TIGER RAG

AUGUST 2026 • VOLUME 49, ISSUE 8

THE LANE KIFFIN RESET

LSU FOOTBALL 2026 SEASON GUIDE

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Inside you'll find complete position-by-position breakdowns, player capsules, roster analysis, schedule previews, SEC outlooks, recruiting insight and features designed to prepare LSU fans for the 2026 season. Whether you're headed to Tiger Stadium or following the Tigers on the road, this guide is built to be your reference all season long.

ON THE COVER

It's here! The 2026 Football Preview has everything you need to know about LSU and new coach Lane Kiffin.

PUBLISHED BY
Kingfish Communications

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Cover Design **JULIUS MCMAINS, JR.**

CSPA COLLEGE SPORTS PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Tiger Rag (USPS 447-970, ISSN 0477-7604) is published monthly by Kingfish Communications, LLC dba Tiger Rag Magazine, 10500 Coursey Boulevard, Suite 104, Baton Rouge, LA and additional mailing offices. POST MASTER: Send address changes to TIGER RAG, 10500 Coursey Boulevard, Suite 104, Baton Rouge, LA 70816-4045

"First Class Permit Imprint #1866, please send returns to: TIGER RAG, 10500 Coursey Boulevard, Suite 104, Baton Rouge, LA 70816-4045"

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EXECUTIVE EDITOR'S NOTE:

MORE THAN ANOTHER FOOTBALL SEASON

TODD HORNE
Tiger Rag Vice President & Executive Editor

Every July, as we begin putting together Tiger Rag's football preview, someone eventually asks the same question.

What makes this season different?

Sometimes the answer is obvious. A Heisman Trophy hopeful returns. A legendary coach has moved on. A national championship still lingers in the rearview mirror. More often at LSU, a coaching change has come because someone was fired. Other years, the differences are subtler, found in a quarterback competition, a recruiting class or a schedule that appears either forgiving or unforgiving depending upon the week.

This year, however, the answer has very little to do with any of those things.

College football itself has changed.

Not incrementally.

Fundamentally.

For generations, programs were built around recruiting classes, coaching continuity and player development measured over three or four years. That rhythm defined the sport for nearly a century. Today, it has been replaced by something entirely different. Rosters can be rebuilt in a matter of months. NIL has introduced market forces few people imagined only five years ago. Revenue sharing has reshaped athletic department budgets. General managers have become as important to championship programs as offensive coordinators. December and April now matter almost as much as Saturdays in October.

The game LSU once dominated has become another game altogether.

That realization shaped every decision we made while assembling this edition.

Yes, you'll find what you've always expected from Tiger Rag. Complete player profiles. Position-by-position analysis. Recruiting insight. SEC previews. Predictions. Features. Columns. The history and traditions that make LSU football unlike anything else in college athletics.

But threaded throughout these pages is another story.

It is the story of a program standing at one of the most consequential intersections in its history.

Scott Woodward's decision to dismiss Brian Kelly, followed only days later by his own departure, created far more than another coaching search. Verge Ausberry inherited a responsibility that extended well beyond selecting LSU's next head football coach. The university found itself asking a larger question:

What kind of football program must LSU become to thrive in the next era of college athletics?

That question became the foundation of our cover story, **"The Lane Kiffin Reset."** It is not intended as a prediction. Championships are never won in July, and coaching hires should be measured over years rather than months. Instead, it examines why LSU believes Lane Kiffin's career uniquely prepared him for this particular moment—and why the university's transformation extends well beyond the headset worn on Saturday afternoons.

You'll notice another theme running quietly through this issue.

Perspective.

Tiger Stadium enters its 103rd football season this fall. Think about that for a moment. More than a century of autumn Saturdays. Generations of families making the same pilgrimage to the same campus. Coaches have come and gone. Players have become legends. Rules have changed. Conferences have expanded. Television transformed the sport. NIL and the transfer portal have reshaped it again.

Through every change, one thing has remained remarkably consistent.

The Standard.

LSU has never expected perfection.

It has expected progress.

That expectation is both the privilege and the burden of leading one of college football's great programs.

Whether this season is ultimately remembered for championships, breakthrough performances or lessons still waiting to be learned will be decided over the next several months. That's why we play the games instead of writing the endings in advance.

Our responsibility at Tiger Rag is different.

It is to provide context before the first kickoff—to explain not only what is happening, but why it matters. We strive to connect today's headlines with yesterday's history and tomorrow's possibilities because LSU football has never existed in a vacuum. It has always reflected something larger about the university, the state of Louisiana and the people who fill Tiger Stadium every fall.

This issue is our attempt to capture that moment.

Thank you for spending another season with us. Whether you've been reading Tiger Rag for forty years or picked up your first copy today, we're grateful you're here.

Now turn the page.
Football season is back.

SCHEDULE SNAPSHOT

Ole Miss Armageddon

Sept. 19 Has Been Circled Since Late November, But LSU Better Be Ready for Sept 26 When The Aggies Visit

GLENN GUILBEAU | *Tiger Rag Editor*

In the recent past, LSU fans could count on only one or two breathless home games a year. Often, it was only one – Alabama in even years and Florida in odd years.

Try four in 2026, fans.

LSU, ranked No. 10 in ESPN's preseason poll, opens what promises to be one of its most exciting seasons in history with electric new coach Lane Kiffin on Sept. 5 against Clemson, a major brand name in college football – the likes of which the Tigers usually do not open a season against at home.

The last five home openers in Tiger Stadium? Louisiana Tech last year, Nicholls State in 2024, Grambling in 2023, Southern in 2022, McNeese State in 2021.

Then all Hell breaks loose two weeks later on Sept. 19 at No. 8 Ole Miss, which is coming off an 11-1 (7-1 SEC) breakthrough regular season in 2025 under Kiffin, who left the Ferrari keys for still virtual interim Pete Golding to make a 2-1 run in the College Football Playoff.

The hate meter will be as high for Kiffin (if not higher) as it was for Nick Saban's return to LSU in 2008 after leaving the Tigers for the Miami Dolphins in 2005 and '06, and then Alabama in 2007. Saban was hung in effigy as fans fantasized that new coach Les Miles was just as good, much like Ole Miss fans are doing now about Golding. Saban beat the Tigers, 27-21, in overtime.

Ole Miss will be really good as it returns key parts of the team Kiffin left, particularly quarterback Trinidad Chambliss. But LSU better not get too emotionally spent in Oxford – win or lose.

Because the next week, the Tigers host perhaps the best team on their schedule on Sept. 26 in No. 9 Texas A&M, which returns much of its 11-2 and 7-1 team of a year ago.

That's two mega games in September, and we haven't got to Alabama yet. The No. 16 Tide will be in on Nov. 7 as the third '25 playoff team on LSU's schedule.

And better not have an Alabama hangover, LSU, for No. 5 Texas will make its first visit to Tiger Stadium since 1953 on Nov. 14.

Not enough? LSU will be at No. 25 Tennessee the very next week for its first trip to Rocky Top since 2017.

Out of breath yet?

9/5 CLEMSON
9/12 LOUISIANA TECH
9/19 AT OLE MISS
9/26 TEXAS A&M
10/3 MCNEESE STATE
10/10 AT KENTUCKY
10/17 MISSISSIPPI STATE
10/24 AT AUBURN
11/7 ALABAMA
11/14 TEXAS
11/21 AT TENNESSEE
11/28 AT ARKANSAS

THE LANE KIFFIN RESET

By **TODD HORNE** | *Vice President & Executive Editor*

For more than a century, Tiger Stadium has been savage and sublime, a cauldron of noise and expectation that feels less like a building than a living, breathing organism.

Ask the locals and they'll tell you it doesn't merely sit there stoic and timeless; it remembers.

It remembers the roar of Billy Cannon turning on Ole Miss, the poetry of Bert Jones carving defenses apart, the fearless swirl of Tommy Casanova in flight, Kevin Faulk refusing to let a game slip away, and Joe Burrow conducting one of the greatest seasons college football has ever seen. It remembers moonlit triumphs and silent, empty mornings after unexpected defeat. But it does not remember excuses.

That lesson is etched into the limestone columns and concrete ramps that saw their first leather-helmeted fans in 1924. Over the last hundred years, the game has evolved—plastic helmets, unlimited substitution, television blasting regional rivalries into national spectacle, scholarship caps, integration, the BCS and the College Football Playoff, the blurring of conference lines, the birth of the transfer portal and NIL. Yet no era in the modern game has rewritten its own rules as radically—or as rapidly—as the four years between Brian Kelly's arrival in December 2021 and his departure on October 25, 2025.

When Kelly walked into LSU's football operations building, the landscape he inherited barely resembled the one Nick Saban confronted 25 years earlier. Before dawn, recruiting calls from agents and prospects in the portal; by lunch, personnel meetings that sounded more like balance-sheet reviews: What's the market value of a veteran left tackle? Can you afford to keep both starting cornerbacks? Is the next million better spent on a quarterback, two defensive linemen, or retaining a sophomore receiver? Decisions once reserved for NFL general managers now consumed Wednesday mornings on Skip Bertman Drive.

Kelly's final ledger was solid if unspectacular.

But Scott Woodward, LSU's then athletic director, wasn't evaluating play-calling proficiency when he met with Kelly on that fateful (and dreadful) night when Texas A&M embarrassed the Tigers in a second half dismantling. He was diagnosing organizational structure: Was LSU equipped to dominate the version of college football that exists today? That question matters far more than any Saturday result because the sport's transformation has been systemic. The transfer portal is infrastructure, not anomaly; revenue sharing is budget, not headline; roster construction mirrors asset management; NIL collectives function like strategic operations. The head coach remains the face of the program — and also its chief executive, generating tens of millions of dollars, employing hundreds, making roster decisions year-round.

Kelly's dismissal on October 25 — and Woodward's departure four days later — didn't fit the tidy, linear narrative most coaching changes follow. The man who decided Kelly would not coach another game never hired his successor. That responsibility shifted almost immediately to Verge Ausberry. And though the title athletic director confers authority, it would miss the story to focus on hierarchy rather than on the man. Ausberry had walked through those hallways for decades. Administrators and boosters and coaches might come and go, but the university endures. Its flagship program needed a leader who understood LSU's truth: Football is built around LSU, not the other way around.

Ausberry understood that the search could not become a referendum on Brian Kelly. Too many athletic departments hire not on vision but reaction: If one coach was reserved, hire someone brash; if one preferred structure, chase the maverick. LSU's challenge was different. The question wasn't Who is the opposite of Brian Kelly? It was Who can lead LSU through the version of college football that exists today? That perspective narrowed the field faster than most realized.

Recruiting prowess, quarterback development, locker-room command and SEC composure remained non-negotiable. But so did six newer imperatives:

1. **Overseeing a roster that effectively reopens twice a year.**
2. **Operating in an environment where personnel moves resemble investment decisions.**
3. **Building an organization that thrives even when the head coach is off campus.**
4. **Embracing a general manager as a competitive advantage.**
5. **Aligning coordinators, analysts, recruiting, player development, sports science, nutrition, NIL strategy and roster management.**
6. **Preserving institutional standards over individual ego.**

When you view Lane Kiffin's résumé through that lens, it stops reading like a series of one-year pit stops. Instead, it unfolds as an education in football leadership:

Oakland (2007): At age 31, Kiffin became the youngest head coach in the modern NFL. He inherited a roomful of seasoned professionals who owed him little respect based on age or résumé. Authority had to be earned daily. The experiment ended painfully, but no success could have taught him what failure did.

Tennessee (2009):
A crucible of relationships—high school coaches, former players, boosters, administrators, a rabid fan base. The role of a college coach became clear: manager of people, politics and perceptions.

USC (2010–13)
Tradition without direction is a prison. USC had talent and resources; what it lacked was alignment. Dozens of small disconnects snowballed. Kiffin learned that unchecked history can be a burden.

Alabama (2014–16)
As Nick Saban's offensive coordinator, Kiffin watched an organizational juggernaut operate Monday through Friday. He saw recruiting tied to roster planning, analysts integral to game prep, accountability baked into systems. The Crimson Tide's Saturday domination was the byproduct of daily discipline.

Florida Atlantic (2017–19)
A true test of ownership. No inherited infrastructure, no Saban to shield the pressure. Every standard came from Kiffin's hires, his expectations, his willingness to reinforce or tolerate discipline. FAU bore his fingerprints from foundation to roofline.

Ole Miss (2020–25)
An incubator for modern roster construction. The portal and NIL had become reality. Resources demanded precision; staff hires had to matter; development wasn't optional. Rebels learned to find value before anyone else, to retain wisely, to spend when necessary and wait when prudent.

Seen cumulatively, Kiffin's stops taught authority (Oakland), institutions (Tennessee), humility (USC), systems (Alabama), ownership (FAU) and efficiency (Ole Miss). When LSU's reset committee evaluated candidates, they didn't ignore his play-calling genius — they realized it was table stakes. They were looking for an architect of organizations.

Within days of accepting the Baton Rouge challenge, Kiffin's blueprint became visible not in an offensive install but in structural moves. Billy Glasscock's title expanded to general manager. In elite football circles, GM roles have become indispensable: high school recruiting, portal evaluation, roster retention, NIL budgets and long-term scholarship planning all intersect in one ecosystem. Glasscock doesn't simply scout players; he evaluates the interconnected tapestry that forms LSU's roster today and six months from now.

Then came the decision to convince and keep Blake Baker as defensive coordinator. A conventional reset would have seen every assistant replaced, new names on every door. But Baker was already one of the nation's premier DCs. Retaining him wasn't convenience — it was confidence. LSU didn't need Baker to morph into Kiffin's man; it needed Baker to remain LSU's man.

Because the Lane Kiffin Reset isn't about replacing every piece. It's about making sure every piece fits the same, larger picture. Activity without purpose is noise. True progress happens on Tuesday mornings in personnel meetings, in hard conversations with players weighing the portal, when assistants leave the room aligned despite disagreements, when a GM tells a head coach a talented player simply doesn't fit the long-term plan—and the coach listens.

Those moments don't trend on social media, but championships often begin there. Kiffin isn't the reset; he is its most visible expression. The reset is organizational: LSU deciding that the next decade demands a different kind of football operation.

Whether it pays off in wins or losses is a story for the scoreboard; the decision itself was made long before the first kickoff of the 2026 season.

Kiffin didn't inherit a roster ready for championships; he constructed one capable of becoming one. LSU has rarely struggled for talent; its challenge has always been molding gifted individuals into teams that can survive four SEC months without one bad Saturday becoming two. That requires leadership, depth, quarterback play, health — and a hundred variables no coach fully controls. Organizational sophistication can't erase those realities; the best structures simply make good decisions more likely.

So when more than 100,000 people walk toward Tiger Stadium this fall — grandparents parking in lots their parents used, children experiencing the pilgrimage for the first time — few will ponder portal valuation models or retention strategies over jambalaya. Their privilege as fans is to believe. Inside the building, the work is infinitely more complex: protect the standard, adapt without losing identity, honor the past without being captive to it, prepare for a future that won't stand still.

That is LSU's assignment. Not to win an introductory press conference or an offseason splash, but to build something capable of enduring. Tiger Stadium has seen too much to expect guarantees. It has watched legends rise and stumbles that no one predicted. It teaches that predictions are among sports' least valuable currencies. What endures are standards — facilities, budgets and recruiting rankings mean little without them.

Each generation inherits those standards and interprets them anew. Every era asks the same question: Can you carry this place forward? Bernie Moore, Paul Dietzel, Charles McClendon, Nick Saban, Les Miles, Ed Orgeron and Brian Kelly all faced it. Now it belongs to Lane Kiffin. His answer will not be found in headlines or highlight reels or even in his first season. It will be measured years from now by whether LSU's program remains stronger than he found it.

That is the story of **The Lane Kiffin Reset.**

Photo by: LSU Athletics.

LANE KIFFIN
Hasn't Coached A Game Yet, But At LSU, He Feels Like He's "EVERYBODY'S COACH"

And He Promises A National Championship – Just Doesn't Know When

GLENN GUILBEAU | *Tiger Rag Editor*

Lane Kiffin may have done the fewest interviews of any first-year LSU football coach in the history of interviews. There have been the normal number of press conferences since he got the job last December, sure, as he went through recruiting and spring football.

But there have been just two real interviews, and both were great. He did one with "Vanity Fair" last April for a feature in which he got himself into trouble with some comments about Mississippi's racial past. And he did one with former LSU legend defensive back Tyrann Mathieu on Mathieu's "In The Bayou" podcast on June 17.

Here are excerpts from the Mathieu interview.

TYRANN MATHIEU: How are you adjusting? I really hope you do feel that love from the people. We're excited. I think everyone in Louisiana, we're all looking forward to it.

LANE KIFFIN: They've been great. Actually, when you said that, it made me think. There was a guy who came into my office and said, 'Coach, you may not be from Louisiana. But now you're of Louisiana.' He was like, 'You're one of us now.' That feels cool to hear, but then when you feel it, when you go to places, and you're out recruiting, or you stop by a restaurant, and you just feel like you're their coach. And the other places you coach, it's like you're half the coach. Like you're in Alabama, well the Auburn people don't like you. Here, it's like you're everybody's coach. It's awesome.

MATHIEU: How has the transition been going from Ole Miss to here?

KIFFIN: I mean, there was a lot going on because we had coaches going back and forth with the playoffs and everything. But once that settled down, it's been awesome. The welcome here, the recruiting weekends. I love the Sunday meetings we have with the families of the recruits. And they talk about just how welcoming the whole town is. They go to the restaurants and various places and they say, 'Everybody loves LSU.' And, 'When you come here, you're one of us.' They could be from New York or California, and they just feel like it's home already.

MATHIEU: What kind of impact will bringing back Ed Orgeron (former LSU national championship coach in 2019 who coached with Kiffin at USC and at Tennessee) have?

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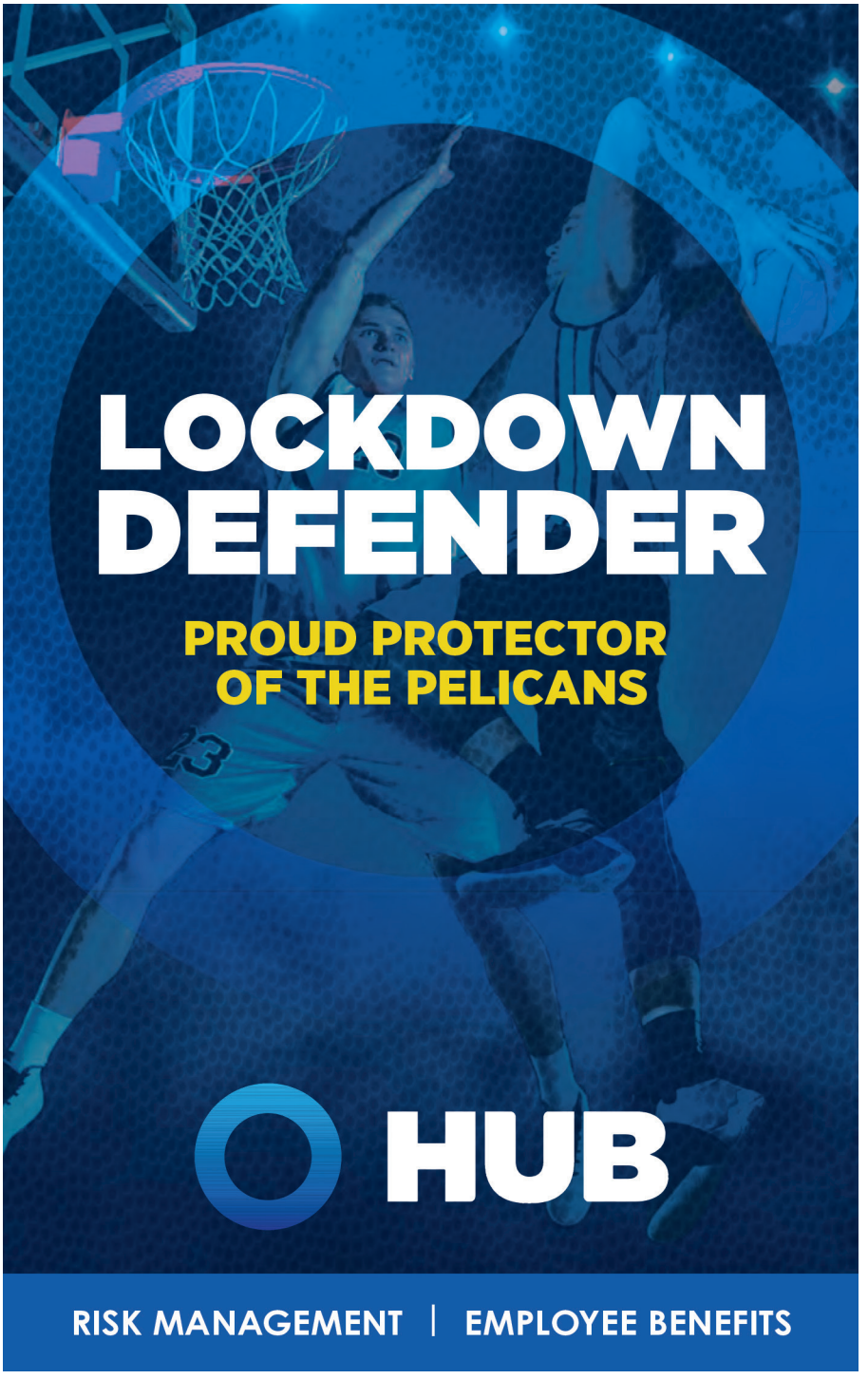


Photo by: LSU Athletics.

KIFFIN: He's always been the best recruiter I've been around. But now when you put him here. Before he was just recruiting for the place he's at, using all of his recruiting skills. Now, you feel it in here. He talks about how, especially to a Louisiana kid, it's in your DNA. At some point, you wanted to play for LSU, you wanted to be a Tiger. But you feel it in him. Because that was him.

MATHIEU: Outside of recruiting, has he given you recommendations for food, where to stay?

KIFFIN: Two weeks before the hiring, I was talking to him, but not that much. So, I was driving down to Grand Isle to fish. I didn't have any time off, so I went for one day.

"I want people to fear LSU the way I had to fear LSU when I was at Alabama. When we were going to play LSU, you knew it was on, especially against their defense. It was on. And you better hope that game is not at LSU, and please don't be at night."

– Lane Kiffin

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Kiffin's fishing trip was likely on Saturday, Nov. 22, as Ole Miss was open that day, and Kiffin previously said he went to the Saints game against Atlanta in the Superdome on Nov. 23. He also rented a car that weekend under the name, Monte Kiffin, which is his middle name after his late father, at the New Orleans Airport, according to Tiger Rag sources. And you can tell from Kiffin's following comments that he had already decided to leave Ole Miss for LSU before Ole Miss won at Mississippi State on Friday, Nov. 28. On Sunday, Nov. 30, in the early afternoon, Tiger Rag reported the deal was done under the headline, "Lane Kiffin IS LSU'S NEXT FOOTBALL COACH."*

KIFFIN: I'm driving and I see the sign for South Lafourche (where Orgeron went to high school and was a lineman on the 1977 state championship team with QB Bobby Hebert). So, I call him, and he starts rambling, 'Greatest place in the world.' He's saying, 'You're going to love the people down there.' So, I went fishing. The fishing captain was awesome. And I could just see how everybody loves him down there. And I was like, 'You know what? This just needs to happen. Ed Orgeron belongs at LSU.' (Kiffin later hired Orgeron as a special recruiting and defensive assistant.)

MATHIEU: What's some of the expectations that we should be able to see?

KIFFIN: I know everyone here is about wins and losses, but my expectations are that we play really smart, physical football and be really good in situations. But the style comes back. Like, I want people to fear LSU the way I had to fear LSU when I was at Alabama (2014-16 as offensive coordinator). When we were going to play LSU, you knew it was on, especially against their defense. It was on. And you better hope that game is not at LSU, and please don't be at night. Because we were like, 'Are we even going to score at all?' Because the guys are going to be at an elite speed and mindset and physical. I want to bring that back. I want to feel that dominating LSU defense that people are scared to play. You might do OK, but you're going to be sore on Sunday.

MATHIEU: I'm sort of hesitant to put the highest expectations on you.

KIFFIN: I don't know how fast it's going to happen, but we're going to win a national championship. And we're going to have the teams and the rosters back to the way that they were back when they were great. Don't know how fast. That might not be today. But it's going to happen, and I feel it in recruiting when these kids come in. TR

2026 POSITION PREVIEW

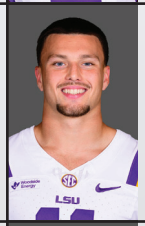
QUARTERBACKS

DUAL-THREAT PLAYMAKERS IN A DANGEROUS OFFENSE

Lane Kiffin's offense is led by top transfer QB Sam Leavitt. It will be a quick turnaround to get these talented signal callers up to speed and ready for SEC Saturdays, but they each have the talent to make explosive plays with their arms and legs.

OVERALL TALENT	EXPERIENCE	DEPTH	NFL POTENTIAL	2026 OUTLOOK
A-	B-	B	B+	A

QUARTERBACK ROOM

#	PLAYER	HT/WT	CLASS	EXP	PREVIOUS SCHOOL(S)	PLAYER CAPSULE
10	SAM LEAVITT West Linn, Ore.	6-2 216	RS JR	-	ARIZONA STATE, MICHIGAN STATE, WEST LINN HS	Arizona State transfer and the centerpiece of Kiffin's first LSU offense. Proven dual-threat quarterback with Power Four starting experience to help the Tigers contend immediately.
6	HUSAN LONGSTREET Corona, Calif.	6-1 195	RS FR	-	SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, CENTENNIAL HS	Elite prospect with high-end arm talent, mobility and long-term upside. Gives LSU a talented developmental option behind Leavitt and could push for situational work.
11	 LANDEN CLARK Radford, Vir.	6-0 195	RS SO	-	ELON, RADFORD HS	FCS quarterback with athleticism to make plays beyond the pocket. Showcased impressive downfield precision and improvisation but will need to adjust to the next level.
9	KADEN MARTIN Atlanta	5-11 231	5TH SR	-	MIDDLE TENNESSEE, ETSU, MIAMI, BUFORD HS	Has not played a collegiate snap in five years at four schools. Originally attended Miami and made two appearances for the Hurricane baseball team.

KIFFIN FIT

Kiffin adapts his offenses to the strengths of his QBs but always values vertical passing ability. All of these passers can create chunk plays from the pocket and quick passes on the move that make his offense so hard to defend.

POSITION OUTLOOK

Leavitt can be as good as any QB in the nation when healthy. Longstreet's elite ceiling could spell him taking over the Tigers' offense sooner rather than later.

BIGGEST STRENGTH

DUAL-THREAT DEPTH

BIGGEST CONCERN

PROVEN SEC-LEVEL PERFORMANCE

PROJECTED STARTER

SAM LEAVITT

PLAYER TO WATCH

HUSAN LONGSTREET

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

HUSAN LONGSTREET

KEY QUESTIONS

Can Sam Leavitt get up to speed in the offense and build chemistry with receivers in a shortened offseason?

SCOUT'S TAKE

Leavitt's ability to navigate the backfield and make off-script plays made him one of the best QBs in the Big 12. He can push the ball down the field and learn a new offense quickly. That will be important for a passer who missed most of spring with a foot injury.

ROOM SNAPSHOT

TOTAL PLAYERS	SENIORS	JUNIORS	SOPHOMORES
4	1	1	1

FRESHMEN	TRANSFERS	RET. STARTERS (2025)
1	4	0

2026 POSITION PREVIEW

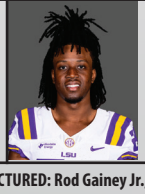
RUNNING BACKS

AN EXPLOSIVE THREE-HEADED MONSTER

Caden Durham and Harlem Berry have the proven acceleration and elusiveness to make defenders miss more often than bring them down. Dilin Jones has already impressed in a short time in Baton Rouge with his work ethic and experienced running. The three should galvanize LSU's lethargic run game.

OVERALL TALENT	EXPERIENCE	DEPTH	NFL POTENTIAL	2026 OUTLOOK
A	A-	A	B+	A

RUNNING BACK ROOM

#	PLAYER	HT/WT	CLASS	EXP	PREVIOUS SCHOOL(S)	PLAYER CAPSULE
29	CADEN DURHAM Oklahoma City, Okla.	5-9 200	JR	2L	DUNCANVILLE HS	Explosive returning runner with the compact build, vision and burst to remain central to LSU's backfield. Enters 2026 as one of LSU's most dependable weapons.
22	HARLEM BERRY New Orleans	5-10 187	SO	1L	ST. MARTIN'S EPISCOPAL SCHOOL--	Former five-star prospect enters second season positioned for a larger role. His acceleration and open-field speed give LSU a home-run threat who can change games.
13	DILIN JONES Laurel, Md.	5-11 211	RS SO	TR	WISCONSIN, OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL HS	Lead back for Wisconsin in 2025 before a season-ending turf-toe injury. His size, patience and footwork make him a go-to option between the tackles.
23	STACY GAGE Tampa, Fla.	5-10 205	RS SO	TR	CENTRAL FLORIDA, ST. THOMAS AQUINAS HS	Former four-star played in 11 games in two seasons at UCF. A physical runner with notable vision in the backfield.
24	 JOSEPH EBUN John's Creek, Ga.	5-11 191	RS JR	TR	CHATTAHOOCHEE HS	Fourth-year Tiger who made his first and only appearance last year.

NOT PICTURED: Rod Gainey Jr., Raycine Guillory Jr.

KIFFIN FIT

In an offense that values explosive runs of 10 yards or more, Durham and Berry are home run sluggers. Jones compliments their electric speed with bruising physicality to attack defenses from all angles.

POSITION OUTLOOK

Durham and Berry likely lead the way, but each of the top three backs will need to play a substantial role in Kiffin's RB-friendly scheme for the offense to succeed.

BIGGEST STRENGTH

DEPTH

BIGGEST CONCERN

SIZE

PROJECTED STARTER

CADEN DURHAM OR HARLEM BERRY

PLAYER TO WATCH

DILIN JONES

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

STACY GAGE

KEY QUESTIONS

How do three starting-caliber runners share the backfield?

SCOUT'S TAKE

The rushing attack has the talent to be the focal point of the offense. Berry and Durham have shown their knack for creating big plays, a feature Kiffin loves in the offense. He's already raved about the competitiveness at the position and the importance of the run game to team identity.

ROOM SNAPSHOT

TOTAL PLAYERS	SENIORS	JUNIORS	SOPHOMORES
7	0	2	4

FRESHMEN	TRANSFERS	RET. STARTERS (2025)
1	4	2

2026 POSITION PREVIEW

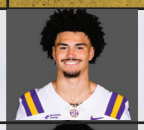
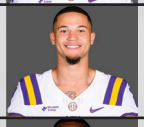
WIDE RECEIVERS

FRESH FACES BRING THE SAME TRADEMARK LSU TALENT

Kiffin brought in 12 new receivers, including nine transfers. The rebuilt room features power four level talents, group of five breakouts and an all-around explosiveness the Tigers have missed from their pass catchers. There may not be an obvious No. 1, but the room is as deep and talented as ever.

OVERALL TALENT	EXPERIENCE	DEPTH	NFL POTENTIAL	2026 OUTLOOK
B-	B	A	C+	B-

WIDE RECEIVER ROOM

#	PLAYER	HT/WT	CLASS	EXP	PREVIOUS SCHOOL(S)	PLAYER CAPSULE
1	 JAYCE BROWN Ft. Walton Beach, Fla.	5-11 175	SR	TR	KANSAS STATE, CHOCTAWHATCHEE HS	Veteran receiver with experience to provide stability in a rebuilt room.
4	JACKSON HARRIS Berkeley, Calif.	6-2 190	RS JR	TR	HAWAI'I, STANFORD, BERKELEY HS	One of college football's top deep-threat receivers in 2025.
6	WINSTON WATKINS JR. Fort Meyers, Fla.	5-10 182	SO	TR	OLE MISS, VENICE HS	Twitchy slot receiver with quick route running and YAC ability.
3	EUGENE "TRE" WILSON III Tampa, Fla.	5-11 190	RS JR	TR	FLORIDA, GAITHER HS	Dynamic veteran receiver capable of creating separation and yards after the catch from multiple alignments.
2	 TRE' BROWN Savannah, Ga.	6-2 190	RS JR	TR	OLD DOMINION, HUTCHINSON CC, JENKINS HS	Elite deep ball receiver averaged over 20 yards a catch with great speed and contested catch ability in one FBS season.
88	MALIK ELZY Chicago	6-2 214	RS JR	TR	ILLINOIS, SIMEON HS	Former four-star played in 23 games with Illinois but never carved out a substantial role.
15	PHILLIP WRIGHT III New Orleans	6-0 171	RS FR	RS	DESTREHAN HS	Has flashed good speed and route running to be a reliable depth option in the slot or explosive play threat.
80	BRAYDEN ALLEN Lafayette	6-2 197	FR	HS	LAFAYETTE CHRISTIAN ACADEMY	Three-star two-way high school player with good top-end speed, change of direction and aerial ability.

NOT PICTURED: Roman Mothershed, Corey Barber Jr, Tyree Holloway, Josh Jackson, Jabari Mack

KIFFIN FIT

Explosive plays are the name of the game for Kiffin, and these wideouts can deliver. The room's depth is also a good fit for Kiffin's quick-tempo offense that features NFL-style route combinations.

POSITION OUTLOOK

The room is deep and productive but is missing the dominant star LSU has become known for. The hope is the competition in the crowded room will birth a future star.

BIGGEST STRENGTH

DEPTH

BIGGEST CONCERN

TOP-END TALENT

PROJECTED STARTERS

X- JAYCE BROWN
Z- JACKSON HARRIS
SLOT- WINNIE WATKINS

PLAYER TO WATCH

TRE WILSON

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

TRE' BROWN

KEY QUESTIONS

Who rises above the rest to become a true SEC WR1?

SCOUT'S TAKE

A combination of Jayce Brown, Watkins, Harris and Wilson give the Tigers a group of versatile playmakers that can beat defenses on every level of the field. The room has it all, proven deep-threats, lightning-quick RAC monsters, agile route runners and physical boundary receivers, but they will have to make plays against SEC competition.

ROOM SNAPSHOT

TOTAL PLAYERS	SENIORS	JUNIORS	SOPHOMORES
13	1	6	2

FRESHMEN	TRANSFERS	RET. STARTERS (2025)
4	9	0

2026 POSITION PREVIEW

TIGHT ENDS

THE NATION'S BEST TE THREAT WITH A STOUT SUPPORTING CAST

Trey'Dez Green is an anomaly at the TE position. The 6-foot-7 target can haul in balls no defender in college football can reach while also torching linebackers with WR-like speed and agility. Behind him is a solid group to supplement blocking ability and provide future upside at the position.

OVERALL TALENT	EXPERIENCE	DEPTH	NFL POTENTIAL	2026 OUTLOOK
A+	B+	C+	A	A

TIGHT ENDS ROOM

#	PLAYER	HT/WT	CLASS	EXP	PREVIOUS SCHOOL(S)	PLAYER CAPSULE
14	**TREY'DEZ GREEN** Jackson	6-7 237	JR	2L	ZACHARY HS	A unicorn whose basketball background shows in his catch radius and body control. Green is a matchup nightmare in the open field and an elite red zone threat.
12	**MALACHI THOMAS** Thomasville, Ga.	6-3 242	JR	TR	PITTSBURGH THOMAS COUNTY CENTRAL HS	Thomas is a balanced tight end who can serve as a blocker and playmaker in simple play action and multi-tight end sets.
44	**ZACH GRACE** Kearney, Mo.	6-2 236	RS JR	TR	OREGON, KEARNEY HS	A blocking specialist who has seen the field more as a fullback than a tight end. May not catch many passes but will be a pivotal extra blocker.
47	**JD LAFLEUR** Sulphur	6-6 254	RS FR	RS	SULPHUR HS	The towering target has legendary LSU pedigree and the potential to be the answer at TE post-green.
81	**LANDON CRAIG** New Orleans	6-3 230	RS SO	SQ	BROTHER MARTIN HS	2024 walk-on who has yet to see any in-game action. Craig was a high school football and javelin standout.

NOT PICTURED: JC Anderson

KIFFIN FIT

Tight ends do it all in Kiffin's offense, so it is fitting he filled his room with a variety of archetypes. Green could be a top receiver for the entire offense, and Thomas and Grace provide the versatility and experience to do the dirty work and earn some of their own production along the way.

POSITION OUTLOOK

Green is a bonafide star. The only downside to that is how it changes the offense when he is not on the field. The other TEs will have important roles, just not his.

BIGGEST STRENGTH

VERSATILITY

BIGGEST CONCERN

DEPTH EXPERIENCE

PROJECTED STARTER

TREY'DEZ GREEN

PLAYER TO WATCH

JD LAFLEUR

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

MALACHI THOMAS

KEY QUESTIONS

Can Green continue to progress as an every-down threat under Lane Kiffin?

SCOUT'S TAKE

There simply is not another player in the nation like Green. He has the advantage in every matchup he will face this season and is poised to have his biggest year yet with Kiffin leading the way. What he may lack as a true blocking TE, the others in the group should help make up for.

ROOM SNAPSHOT

TOTAL PLAYERS	SENIORS	JUNIORS	SOPHOMORES
6	0	3	1

FRESHMEN	TRANSFERS	RET. STARTERS (2025)
2	2	1

2026 POSITION PREVIEW

OFFENSIVE LINE

FIVE-STAR TACKLES WITH A VETERAN INTERIOR

Tackles Jordan Seaton and Weston Davis have the size and athleticism to play on Sundays. Seaton has shown that production as a top transfer while Davis tries to rebound from an inconsistent 2025. Braelin Moore, Bo Bordelon, and Aliouh Bah bring maturity and communication to the offensive front that needs to be much improved this year.

OVERALL TALENT	EXPERIENCE	DEPTH	NFL POTENTIAL	2026 OUTLOOK
B+	A-	C	B	B

OFFENSIVE LINE ROOM

#	PLAYER	HT/WT	CLASS	EXP	PREVIOUS SCHOOL(S)	PLAYER CAPSULE
77	JORDAN SEATON Washington D.C.	6-5 307	JR	TR	COLORADO, IMG ACADEMY	Former five-star and transfer portal headliner with elite athleticism and pass protection. An experienced starter with NFL first-rounder upside.
55	ALIOUH BAH Memphis, Tenn.	6-5 327	5TH SR	TR	MARYLAND, GEORGIA, IMG ACADEMY	A massive force on the interior of the line with the starting experience to bring maturity and positional versatility to the room.
67	BO BORDELON Raceland	6-6 305	5TH SR	3L	ISADORE NEWMAN SCHOOL	A fifth-year Tiger who emerged as the likely starting LG in the spring. Former three-star high school prospect.
61	BRAELIN MOORE Bethlehem, Pa.	6-2 301	5TH SR	1L	VIRGINIA TECH, FREEDOM HS	Returning starting center who serves as the physical and communicational leader in the middle of the trenches.
75	WESTON DAVIS Beaumont, Texas	6-6 315	RS SO	2L	BEAUMONT UNITED HS	Returning starting right tackle. A former five-star with ideal measurables that struggled as a starter last season but showed late success to carry into 2026.

NOT PICTURED: Jakolby Jones, Ryan Miret, Ja'Quan Sprinkle, Hayes Fuqua, Ja'Mard Jones Jr., Sean Thompkins Jr., Solomon Thomas, Brett Bordelon, Darrin Strey, Devin Harper, Brysten Martinez, Adrian Lamb, Braden Augustus, Weston Davis, Christian Stamps

KIFFIN FIT

The front has the experience needed to handle the tempo and misdirection of Kiffin's offense. The tackles will need to show improvement in the run game, but all five starters have the athleticism to support a multi-faceted attack.

POSITION OUTLOOK

The starting front looks strong on paper: veteran leadership with elite talent. Beyond a few promising depth options, there is not much experience.

BIGGEST STRENGTH

STARTING EXPERIENCE

BIGGEST CONCERN

ENFORCING THE RUN GAME

PROJECTED STARTERS

LT- JORDAN SEATON
LG- BO BORDELON
C- BRAELIN MOORE
RG- ALIOU BAH
RT- WESTON DAVIS

PLAYER TO WATCH

BO BORDELON

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

DEVIN HARPER

KEY QUESTIONS

Can Weston Davis develop into the dominant SEC tackle he was projected to be?

SCOUT'S TAKE

Seaton is one of the best pass protectors in the nation. Davis has the talent to be right there with him. The patchwork group of transfers, returning starters and veteran back-ups will need to build chemistry with one another quickly. The unit has the potential to be the most improved on the team.

ROOM SNAPSHOT

TOTAL PLAYERS	SENIORS	JUNIORS	SOPHOMORES
20	3	6	5

FRESHMEN	TRANSFERS	RET. STARTERS (2025)
6	10	2

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Orthopedic Surgery

Kyle Bramley, PT
Physical Therapy

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2026 POSITION PREVIEW

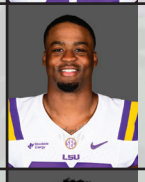
DEFENSIVE LINE

CURRENT STANDOUTS AND FUTURE STARS

Princewill Umanmielen is already one of the best pass rushers in the SEC. The interior of the front features seasoned veterans who will look to improve their production. One of LSU's most talented groups of freshmen defensive linemen ever join the room to make dividing the rotation a headache for the coaching staff.

OVERALL TALENT	EXPERIENCE	DEPTH	NFL POTENTIAL	2026 OUTLOOK
B+	B+	B	B	B+

DEFENSIVE LINE ROOM

#	PLAYER	HT/WT	CLASS	EXP	PREVIOUS SCHOOL(S)	PLAYER CAPSULE
1	**PRINCEWILL UMANMIELEN** Austin, Texas	6-4 244	SR	TR	OLE MISS, NEBRASKA, MANOR HS	Veteran EDGE supplies immediate pass-rush production and SEC-ready physicality. His experience and explosiveness make him a headliner on the defensive front.
96	**DOMINICK MCKINLEY** Lafayette	6-6 297	JR	2L	ACADIANA HS	Massive, athletic interior defender with the length and movement skills to disrupt both run and pass games. Former five-star will need to continue development in growing role.
47	**MALIK BLOCTON** Pike Road, Ala.	6-3 286	JR	TR	AUBURN, PIKE ROAD HS	A fifth-year Tiger who emerged as the likely starting LG in the spring. Former three-star high school prospect.
29	 **JORDAN ROSS** Birmingham, Ala.	6-5 246	JR	TR	TENNESSEE, VESTAVIA HILLS	Former five-star with SEC experience but underwhelming production. He has elite speed and length and could play on Sundays but needs to produce in a larger role.
55	**LAMAR BROWN** Erwinville	6-4 295	FR	HS	UNIVERSITY LAB HS	One of the nation's top recruits, a two-way star with the physical traits to make a rotational impact as a true freshman.

NOT PICTURED:Shone Washington, Gabriel Reliford, Jordan Ross, Stephilyan Green, Damien Shanklin, Kolaj Cobbins, Joey August, Richard Anderson, Trenton Henderson, Brandon Brown, Jaylen Brown , Dylan Carpenter, Achilles Woods, Deuce Geralds

BAKER FIT

Defensive coordinator Blake Baker's frequent rotation of big men on the front of the defense lends itself well to a group that needs to decipher a crowd of experienced veterans and young talents with immense potential. The competition should fuel this room to be the disruptive engine Baker needs it to be.

POSITION OUTLOOK

Umanmielen is a proven asset. Experience leads the way on the interior, and fresh and former five-stars load a room begging for another star to emerge. They will need multiple players to break out to become a dominant front.

BIGGEST STRENGTH

LONG-TERM POTENTIAL

BIGGEST CONCERN

IMMEDIATE PRODUCTION; INTERIOR

PROJECTED STARTERS

EDGE- PRINCEWILL UMANMIELEN
DL- DOMINICK MCKINLEY
DL- MALIK BLOCTON
EDGE- JORDAN ROSS

PLAYER TO WATCH

STEPHIYLAN GREEN

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

DEUCE GERALDS

KEY QUESTIONS

Can anyone take the next step to become a consistent threat alongside Umanmielen?

SCOUT'S TAKE

With the exception of Umanmielen, many of the guys in the room have either jaw-dropping talent or power four experience, rarely both. Richard Anderson and Lamar Brown could be future stars, but having that impact in year one is a tall order. The returners and transfers have starting reps at the highest level of college football.

ROOM SNAPSHOT

TOTAL PLAYERS	SENIORS	JUNIORS	SOPHOMORES
18	2	6	4

FRESHMEN	TRANSFERS	RET. STARTERS (2025)
6	6	1

2026 POSITION PREVIEW

LINEBACKERS

A PRODUCTIVE TRANSFER JOINS A RETURNING GROUP OF STARS

TJ Dottery, Whit Weeks and Dahvon Keys would each be the best LB on a majority of college football rosters. To put them all on one unit feels like some sort of mini super-team. The trio terrorizes opposing ball carriers with instant anticipation, tenacious pursuit and bruising physicality.

OVERALL TALENT	EXPERIENCE	DEPTH	NFL POTENTIAL	2026 OUTLOOK
B+	A	B+	B	A

LINEBACKERS ROOM

#	PLAYER	HT/WT	CLASS	EXP	PREVIOUS SCHOOL(S)	PLAYER CAPSULE
40	WHIT WEEKS Watkinsville, Ga.	6-3 223	SR	3L	OCONEE COUNTY HS	The emotional and productive center of LSU's defense. Weeks combines instincts, range and relentless effort, to set the standard in the locker room as one of the SEC's top linebackers.
6	TJ DOTTERY Montgomery, Ala.	6-2 225	5TH SR	TR	OLE MISS, CLEMSON, MONTGOMERY CATHOLIC PREPARATORY	Another on-field leader who led the SEC in tackles in 2025. A natural off-ball linebacker who is at his best against the run.
42	DAHVON KEYS Aledo, Texas	6-0 227	JR	2L	ALEDO HS	A two-year returning starter who led the team in tackles last season. Keys offers versatility as a competent coverage backer with explosive closing speed and high football IQ.
24	TYLEN SINGLETON Many	6-1 227	RS SO	2L	MANY HS	A ready plug-and-play LB who spent last year as an indispensable depth piece. Broke out with nine tackles in his one start in the Texas Bowl and should continue to develop.
31	CJ JIMCOILY Nashville	6-3 218	SO	1L	LIPSCOMB ACADEMY	Former four-star safety with the speed and footwork to match receivers in coverage. Jimcoily added weight at LSU to become a force in the box that can be an effective STAR sub-LB.

NOT PICTURED: Charles Ross II, Jaiden Braker, Keylan Moses, Zach Weeks, Theo Grace, Jake Ibieta

BAKER FIT

Baker likes to switch up formations but is known for his 4-2-5 scheme that features a versatile, hybrid DB/LB in the STAR role. With this talented trio of LBs, though, it would not be surprising if the Tigers employed more 4-3 looks to get their best playmakers on the field.

POSITION OUTLOOK

Weeks and Dottery lead the way as one of the country's top LB tandems. Keys fits as an exceptional understudy and occasional sub while the rest of the room competes for rotational work and continues to progress for when the starting duo move on.

BIGGEST STRENGTH

PROVEN PRODUCTION

BIGGEST CONCERN

INEXPERIENCED SECOND-YEAR LOG JAM

PROJECTED STARTERS

WHIT WEEKS
TJ DOTTERY

PLAYER TO WATCH

TYLEN SINGLETON

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

TJ DOTTERY

KEY QUESTIONS

Can Whit Weeks return to his dominant form after an injury-riddled 2025? Can TJ Dottery make a seamless transition?

SCOUT'S TAKE

Weeks and Dottery are solid, smart playmakers in the middle of the defense. They are poised to be one of the top tackling duos in the SEC and vocal leaders on the field. Behind them is another terror in Keys and a group of talented young players who supply future upside and reliable depth.

ROOM SNAPSHOT

TOTAL PLAYERS	SENIORS	JUNIORS	SOPHOMORES
11	2	2	3

FRESHMEN	TRANSFERS	RET. STARTERS (2025)
4	2	0

2026 POSITION PREVIEW

DEFENSIVE BACKS

DBU IS BACK?

DJ Pickett and PJ Woodland have the talent and experience to be a pair of lockdown man corners. Ty Benefield, Tamarcus Cooley and Dashawn Spears are versatile defenders that can create turnovers in the secondary and support the defensive front in the run game.

OVERALL TALENT	EXPERIENCE	DEPTH	NFL POTENTIAL	2026 OUTLOOK
A	B+	C-	B+	B

DEFENSIVE BACKS ROOM

#	PLAYER	HT/WT	CLASS	EXP	PREVIOUS SCHOOL(S)	PLAYER CAPSULE
3	**DJ PICKETT** Zephyrhills, Fla.	6-4 189	SO	1L	ZEPHYRHILLS HS	Long, rangy cornerback with elite ball skills and recruiting pedigree and the physical tools to become a cornerstone of LSU's secondary.
0	**TAMARCUS COOLEY** Raleigh, N.C.	6-0 206	RS JR	1L	NC STATE, ROLESVILLE HS	Experienced safety with the versatility to align deep, in the box or over the slot. LSU will rely on Cooley's returning physicality and coverage background
2	**TY BENEFIELD** Altadena, Calif	6-3 208	SR	TR	BOISE STATE, CREAN LUTHERAN HS	Big, experienced safety whose size and range fit the modern SEC secondary. Benefield was dominant in the Mountain West and is already a standout on the LSU defense.
11	**PJ WOODLAND** Hattiesburg,Miss	5-11 164	JR	2L	OAK GROVE HS	A physical man press coverage corner who plays bigger than his frame. Top 10 in the SEC in passes defended and PBUs last year.
10	**DASHWAN SPEARS** Denham Springs	6-3 209	JR	2L	DENHAM SPRINGS HS	Returning rotational contributor poised for a breakout in the STAR role. Versatile athlete who can cover and stuff the run with a great combination of size and speed.

NOT PICTURED: Faheem Delane, PJ Woodland, Michael Turner Jr., Havon Finney Jr., Aidan Anding, Aiden Hall, Dez Ellis, Jhase Thomas, Treylan James, Isaiah Washington, Mason Dossett, Jackson Williams, Lavonte Williams, Seth Knothe

BAKER FIT

Baker likes physical corners who can hold their own in man coverage. Check. Safeties need to be able to hawk balls down the field or make plays as a rusher. Check. Most importantly, Baker needs a STAR that can fill in anywhere on the field. Check. A versatile unit poised to have another big season with Baker at the helm.

POSITION OUTLOOK

LSU has bonafide stars across all the starting spots but could face challenges if the Tigers are forced to rely on the depth in the room. If they can stay healthy, it can be one of the best secondaries in the SEC, but over the course of a full season, that is a big if.

BIGGEST STRENGTH

ATHLETIC VERSATILITY

BIGGEST CONCERN

DEPTH

PROJECTED STARTERS

CB-PJ WOODLAND
CB- DJ PICKETT
FS- TY BENEFIELD
SS- TAMARCUS COOLEY
STAR- DASHAWN SPEARS

PLAYER TO WATCH

JA'KEEM JACKSON

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

HAVON FINNEY JR.

KEY QUESTION

Who is prepared to take over if one of the top two corners goes down?

SCOUT'S TAKE

Pickett and Woodland are near opposite archetypes who can both be lockdown corners. Pickett's length and Woodland's physicality will need to shine in the absence of All-American Mansoor Delane. Benefield has the difficult challenge of replacing A.J. Haulcy but can do just about everything along with Cooley and Spears who are excellent against both the pass and run.

ROOM SNAPSHOT

TOTAL PLAYERS	SENIORS	JUNIORS	SOPHOMORES
21	2	6	6

FRESHMEN	TRANSFERS	RET. STARTERS (2025)
7	5	3

2026 POSITION PREVIEW

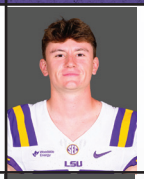
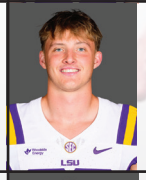
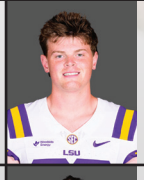
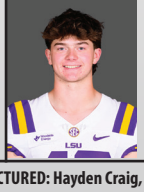
SPECIALISTS

PROVEN SEC LEGS WITH TALENTED REINFORCEMENTS

Scott Starzyk was the conference's top freshman placekicker at Arkansas. He joins second-year Tigers punter Grant Chadwick and long snapper Silas Hall to complete a unit with real experience and a strong record. A duo of former Gators and homegrown talents fill out the room.

OVERALL TALENT	EXPERIENCE	DEPTH	NFL POTENTIAL	2026 OUTLOOK
B+	B-	C	D	C+

SPECIALISTS ROOM

#	PLAYER	HT/WT	CLASS	EXP	PREVIOUS SCHOOL(S)	PLAYER CAPSULE
80	 SCOTT STARZYK The Woodlands, Texas	5-9 175	SO	TR	ARKANSAS, THE WOODLANDS HS	An experienced SEC kicker who did not miss a kick inside 40 yards in one year as a Razorback and had two made field goals over 50 yards.
90	 GRANT CHADWICK Tullahoma, Tenn.	6-5 213	JR	1L	MIDDLE TENNESSEE, TULLAHOMA HS	Returning LSU punter and holder who earned All-SEc honors with a 45.7 yard average punt distance – 2nd in the SEC.
36	AIDAN CORBELLO New Orleans	5-9 199	RS JR	SQ	JESUIT HS	A 2023 walks-on who is the son of former Tigers kicker John Corbello. He has not seen any live action but was a top Louisiana high school leg.
39	 MACK MULHERN Scottsdale, Ariz.	6-1 224	RS FR	TR	FLORIDA, HORIZON HS	No. 2 long snapper in the 2025 class with four years of eligibility after not seeing the field as a true freshman at Florida.
43	 SILAS HALL Baton Rouge	6-3 216	SO	1L	EPISCOPAL HS	Returning LSU long snapper who was an Freshman All-SEC selection last year.

NOT PICTURED: Hayden Craig, Gavin Higgins, Sean Perret

HOUSTON FIT

Special teams coordinator Joe Houston arrives from a productive unit at Florida and brings some young talents with him. He served as senior analyst for a unit that went 18-for-22 on field goals, averaged 44 yards per punt and did not allow a kickoff or punt return touchdown.

POSITION OUTLOOK

Starzyk, Chadwick and Hall are reliable SEC starters. The Florida transfers proved some talented but inexperienced depth and competition in the room.

BIGGEST STRENGTH

SEC EXPERIENCE

BIGGEST CONCERN

SMALL SAMPLE SIZE

PROJECTED STARTERS

K- SCOTT STARZYK
P- GRANT CHADWICK
LS- SILAS HALL

PLAYER TO WATCH

SCOTT STARZYK

NEWCOMER TO WATCH

HAYDEN CRAIG

KEY QUESTIONS

Can Starzyk replicate his freshman success and fill the void left by Damian Ramos?

SCOUT'S TAKE

While they might not be the highlight of the team, Starzyk and Chadwick have enough experience to not create any extra problems for an LSU team with more than enough roster turnover to worry about.

ROOM SNAPSHOT

TOTAL PLAYERS	SENIORS	JUNIORS	SOPHOMORES
8	0	2	2

FRESHMEN	TRANSFERS	RET. STARTERS (2025)
4	3	2

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Lane Kiffin
Photo by: LSU Athletics.

LANE KIFFIN

The Yoda Of Ultra-Modern College Football Offenses

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | *Tiger Rag Editor*

The national offensive numbers produced by coach Lane Kiffin at Ole Miss from 2020-25 were constant through a parade of quarterbacks, running backs and wide receivers and coordinators.

Also constant was a very fast up-tempo style, tempered by effective run games.

2020 – No. 3 in total offense at 555.5 yards a game with OC Jeff Lebby, No. 5 in passing by Matt Corral at 333.7 and 26 in rushing at 210.6. … 5-5 season.

2021 – No. 6 in total offense at 492.5 with Lebby, 12 in rushing at 217.6, Corral at No. 23 with 257.6. … 10-3, 6-2 SEC for first 10-win regular season in program history.

2022 – No. 8 in total offense at 496.4 and No. 3 in rushing at 256.6 with new OC Charlie Weis Jr., who was Kiffin's OC in 2018-19 at Florida Atlantic. Sophomore USC transfer quarterback Jaxson Dart finishes 51st in passing yards at 228.8. … But the Rebels dip to 8-4 and 4-4.

2023 – No. 13 in total offense at 461.9 for Kiffin's worst at Ole Miss. Dart improves to No. 26 in passing with 258.8 a game. … 11-2, 6-2 with win over No. 10 Penn State in Peach Bowl.

2024 – No. 2 in total offense at 526.5 and in passing at 350.8 with a No. 3 in scoring at 38.6. Dart jumps to No. 3 in passing at 329.2 and No. 1 in efficiency at 180.7 (276-398, 6 INTs, 29 TDs). … 10-3, 5-3, but no CFP.

2025 – No. 2 in total offense at 489.7, No. 3 in passing at 313.3, 10th in points at 36.9. New quarterback Trinidad Chambliss finishes No. 3 in passing with 3,937 yards and rushes for 527. … With an 11-1, 7-1 regular season, Ole Miss reaches the CFP for the first time as Kiffin leaves for LSU. The Rebels finish 13-2 and No. 3 nationally, capping the program's best four years since coach Johnny Vaught in the late 1950s, early '60s.

Key to Kiffin's offenses are Explosive Plays, which Pro Football Focus defines as runs of 10 or more yards, completions of 15 or more. Ole Miss led FBS schools with 905 explosive plays from 2021-25 – 523 passes, 382 runs. Oregon was next with 842. LSU was a distant 38th with 723.

The Tigers had 425 explosives in the air and 298 on the ground over that span.

Dart had 276 explosive passes from 2021-24.

"He's Yoda because of his wisdom, his knowledge," Dart, a Star Wars fan, said in 2024. "I'm constantly learning from him. You go across college football and ask any coach, they'd say he's one of the best, if the not the best, offensive mind."

And it came from defense. Kiffin's late father Monte was one of the greatest defensive coordinators in NFL history with Tampa Bay. And Kiffin coached under college defensive mastermind Nick Saban at Alabama from 2014-16.

"They were always talking about what offenses gave them problems, and I just kind of kept all that information," Kiffin said. "And then added the tempo part."

LSU, get ready for an explosion of offense.

"The explosive plays pay off," Kiffin said. TR

Blake Baker
Photo by: LSU Athletics.

LANE KIFFIN Liked How BLAKE BAKER Stopped His Offenses

So, Problem Solved – He Made Sure He Kept Him At LSU

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | *Tiger Rag Editor*

Lane Kiffin remembers Nick Saban often saying, "never miss an opportunity to learn from a loss."

Kiffin, the offensive guru now the head coach at LSU, split four games with defensive coordinator Blake Baker, the aggressive, blitz-happy defensive coordinator now entering his third season at LSU.

And Kiffin remembers the losses well.

Oct. 26, 2018 – Louisiana Tech 21, Florida Atlantic 13: Baker was in his fourth season as Tech's defensive coordinator. Kiffin was in his second as Florida Atlantic's head coach, and he did not have a good day in Boca Raton. Baker's defense allowed one third down conversion to Kiffin in 11 tries while collecting three sacks and holding FAU quarterback Rave Peavey to 15-of-26 passing for 115 yards with an interception.

"We just screwed up with some turnovers and were atrocious on third down," Kiffin sad after the game.

Oct. 12, 2024 – No. 13 LSU 29, No. 8 Ole Miss 26 In Overtime: Kiffin brought in a 5-1 team with the No. 1 portal class in the country. The Rebels dominated the first quarter with 140 yards to 42, but didn't score. Ole Miss led 17-13 at the half, but it should have been by more as Kiffin went for it on fourth and one from the LSU 4-yard line and failed.

The Rebels allowed six sacks to Baker's blitzing, and the loss kept them out of the College Football Playoff as they finished 10-3 and 5-3 in the SEC. The year before without Baker at LSU, Ole Miss beat the Tigers, 55-49, with 706 total yards – the most against LSU in history. Quarterback Jaxson Dart threw for 389 and four touchdowns, and Quinshon Judkins rushed for 177 yards on 33 carries.

"Playing LSU every year like we did at the previous place, we had to watch the transformation defensively when Blake got here and how much they improved each season," Kiffin said.

This is why he decided to keep Baker at LSU after the 2025 season as Baker's alma mater Tulane tried to make him its head coach. Baker enters his third season directing LSU's defense, which has improved significantly in each of his two seasons.

"It was really critical to keep him, because now we want to go to another level and play really physical, dominant defense that creates a lot of havoc and turnovers and plays with great discipline," Kiffin said.

"We're going to cause havoc on the field," edge rusher Jordan Ross, a transfer from Tennessee said. "That's what we worked on in spring."

Baker's defense is all about havoc. And for the first time at LSU, he appears to have the type players at all positions to do that with his disguised coverages, gap blitzes and blitzes from all areas on the field, particularly cornerback.

"We like to keep opponents on their toes and guessing where we're coming from," Baker said. "It's about pressure."

Kiffin remembers that. TR

LSU'S SEASON COULD SWING ON THE RIGHT FOOT OF QUARTERBACK

SAM LEAVITT

Transfer Portal's No. 1 Player Expected Back At 100 Percent From Lisfranc Surgery

By KACE KIEISCHNICK | *Tiger Rag Staff Writer*

The 2026 LSU Tigers will go as far as redshirt junior quarterback Sam Leavitt's right arm and legs can take them.

Fortunately for Lane Kiffin and the Tigers, Leavitt was the No. 1 prospect in the transfer portal and has a proven record of excelling in year one in a new program.

Unfortunately, one of those legs is attached to a right foot that underwent Lisfranc surgery last year and just had the screws removed in April.

This season, Leavitt enters the third school of his collegiate career and sixth since 2019, counting high schools.

Sam Leavitt
Photo by: LSU Athletics

The four-star high school prospect began his prep career at Westview High in Portland, Oregon. As a sophomore, his family moved to Pleasant Grove, Utah, where he completed 103 of 196 passes for 1,672 yards and 17 TDs in 11 games.

A new home, a new Sam Leavitt.

He then moved back to Westview as a junior and led the Wildcats to a 9-2 record with 2,033 passing yards and 26 touchdowns, but his Westview team was eliminated in the second round of the Class 6A Oregon High School playoffs.

Time for another change of scenery.

Leavitt transferred to West Linn High School for his senior season in 2022 and finished with a 12-1 record and the Class 6A state championship. He threw for 3,184 yards and 36 touchdowns and racked up 693 yards and 8 TDs on the ground.

He was named MaxPreps Oregon High School Player of the Year and Gatorade Oregon Football Player of the Year while being ranked as high as the No. 76 recruit in the class of 2023. He committed to Michigan State and redshirted as a freshman, appearing in just four games.

But this mobile gunslinger was not done scrambling. Again, a new school welcomed an improved Leavitt.

This time it was an Arizona State team that started three different quarterbacks the year prior. He led the Sun Devils to an 11-3 campaign, Big 12 title and the school's first College Football Playoff appearance.

In 13 starts, Leavitt completed 61.7 percent of his passes for 2,885 yards, 24 touchdowns and six interceptions. He ran for 433 yards and five TDs on 110 carries and was named Big 12 Freshman of the Year and second-team all-conference. In the Big 12 championship game, Leavitt completed 12 of 17 passes for 219 yards and three TDs and ran for another touchdown in a 45-19 win over Iowa State.

"Sam's good. Sam's really good. I keep saying it," Arizona State coach Kenny Dillingham said late in the 2024 season. "Sam's really good,

and we should be really happy that we have Sam, and we have him for two to three more years. I mean, Sam's going to play on Sundays. There's zero doubt in my mind Sam's an NFL player."

A ligament injury in his mid-right foot limited Leavitt to only seven starts last year as he led ASU to a 5-2 record. On pace to surpass his 2024 campaign, he completed 145 of 239 passes for 1,628 yards, 10 TDs and three interceptions and added 306 yards and five TDs on the ground before the injury.

Now, he arrives in Baton Rouge. Again, poised to improve, but battling a new challenge.

Leavitt's Lisfranc (named after Jacques Lisfranc de St. Martin, a French surgeon in the 1800s) procedure on Oct. 31 realigned displaced or torn metatarsal bones in the center of his right foot with stabilizing screws. The injury and surgery are not uncommon in college athletics. Almost all athletes who experience the season-ending surgery return for the next year but typically experience a minor decrease in production.

Leavitt signed with Kiffin and the Tigers in January, but he missed the bulk of spring practice before and after having the screws from his surgery removed on April 6.

The expected starter was fully cleared for fall practice over the summer. A video even surfaced of him dunking the football over the goalpost at the LSU practice facility. Kiffin was not that concerned that his quarterback missed the majority of spring.

"Years ago, you'd have been really concerned that the quarterback's going to miss your spring," Kiffin said. "He's done a great job mentally in the meetings and walk-throughs and was able to throw some individually before this procedure."

Kiffin and offensive coordinator Charlie Weis Jr. got quarterback Trinidad Chambliss ready for a superstar 2025 season in just a summer as Chambliss had not transferred in time from Division II Ferris State to make spring practices. All he did was throw for 3,937 yards and 22 TDs after an abbreviated offseason and enters this season as a Heisman Trophy contender.

And Kiffin and Weis Jr. are also not that worried because they are used to developing transfer QBs into immediate stars. They helped USC transfer Jaxson Dart become a first-round NFL Draft pick after the 2024 season. He passed for 2,974 yards and 10 touchdowns and ran for 614 yards and a score in his first year at Ole Miss in 2022.

The Kiffin-Weis offense has produced a 3,000-yard passer in each of the last three seasons, and Leavitt has the talent and tenacity to make his mark in year one at LSU.

The redshirt junior is an exceptional improviser in the backfield, an explosive threat in open space and a creative passer who can make any throw on the field. Most importantly, he adapts quickly.

Westview, Pleasant Grove, West Linn, Michigan State, Arizona State, LSU — wherever he goes, he succeeds, and he gets better at each stop along the way.

And he does not wait around to do it.

"He's really a quick study," Jon Eagle, who was Leavitt's coach at West Linn High, told Tiger Rag. "What he's really good at, too, is deciphering a lot of information in half a second, which is important for a quarterback looking at the field." TR

LSU'S $40 MILLION BET

By TODD HORNE | *Vice President & Executive Editor*

LSU has not released a payroll sheet for Lane Kiffin's first football roster. There is no public, player-by-player accounting of direct revenue-sharing payments, third-party name, image and likeness agreements or the private commitments required to retain returning players and attract transfers.

But the available evidence points in one direction.

LSU appears to have invested at least $40 million—and perhaps closer to $50 million—in its 2026 football roster, combining school-funded revenue sharing with legitimate third-party NIL compensation.

CBS Sports reported in March that sources placed LSU's roster cost between $40 million and $50 million. The outlet had previously reported LSU's original commitment was believed to be between $25 million and $30 million before the available pool increased to approximately $40 million through NIL and revenue-sharing resources.

ESPN has repeatedly referred to LSU's "reportedly $40 million roster." Former LSU coach Brian Kelly later suggested the actual figure was closer to $50 million, though that estimate has not been independently verified.

Understanding the number requires separating revenue sharing from third-party NIL. Under the House settlement, schools may directly share approximately $20.5 million with athletes across all sports. Third-party NIL agreements remain outside that cap if they reflect legitimate market-value business arrangements.

Therefore, a $40 million football roster does not mean LSU wrote $40 million in university checks to football players. The estimate combines football's share of institutional revenue sharing with outside NIL compensation and retention agreements.

It also should not be confused with portal spending alone. LSU's top-ranked transfer class represented only part of the investment. Retaining elite returning players required significant commitments as well.

The significance is not merely that LSU spent heavily. It is that LSU chose not to treat Lane Kiffin's first season as a rebuilding year.

LSU paid to accelerate the reset.

Money cannot create chemistry or guarantee victories. But it can dramatically improve the quality of the roster assembled before the first kickoff.

The financial message is unmistakable.

LSU did not ask Lane Kiffin to patiently build toward championship contention.

It gave him one of college football's most expensive rosters and asked him to begin there.

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Jordan Seaton
Photo by: LSU Athletics.

10 Players Who Will Define LSU's Season

And They're Not All From The Portal

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | *Tiger Rag Editor*

Coach Lane Kiffin has brought in 60 scholarship players for 2026 – 41 from the No. 1 portal class and 19 from the No. 13 recruiting class.

The Tigers have not had more dramatic turnover between seasons in program history. How the new players perform will be significant, but look for critical impacts from a handful of returnees from LSU's disappointing 7-6 season in 2025.

Here are the 10 who will define the season:

QUARTERBACK
SAM LEAVITT
The No. 1 QB and player in the portal, the redshirt junior from Arizona State has LSU's immediate future in his hands and right foot, which he had surgery on last season that limited him to seven games. He is expected to be 100 percent for August. When healthy in 2024, Leavitt threw for 2,885 yards and 24 TDs with six interceptions in 13 games, taking the Sun Devils to the CFP and an 11-3 finish while rushing for 443 yards and five touchdowns.

EDGE
PRINCEWILL UMANMIELEN
The No. 1 edge in the portal, the LSU senior had nine sacks last season for Ole Miss and has 19 career QB hurries.

LEFT TACKLE
JORDAN SEATON
The No. 1 offensive tackle and No. 3 overall portal player from Colorado, the junior will be the pillar of the rebuilt offensive line that has been average to bad for too long.

TIGHT END
TREY'DEZ GREEN
Likely the best tight end in the nation and a prized mismatch (6-7, 237) for Leavitt. Green caught 33 for 433 yards and seven TDs last season as a sophomore.

MIDDLE LINEBACKER
WHIT WEEKS
If this key senior leader can return to his 2024 form before the ankle injury that limited him to eight games last season, look out.

WIDE RECEIVER
JAYCE BROWN
The most experienced of the nine WRs added, the deep threat senior from Kansas State caught 88 for 1,535 yards and 10 TDs the last two seasons.

CORNERBACK
DJ PICKETT
The five-star freshman lived up to his billing last season with three interceptions and two sacks.

SAFETY
TY BENEFIELD
One of the most discussed additions, the senior had 107 tackles at Boise State last year.

RUNNING BACK
DILIN JONES
A bigger back (5-11, 211), he could be Kiffin's power source between the tackles.

CENTER
BRAELIN MOORE
The senior will be a stabilizing leadership force amid the new faces. TR

Ty Benefield
Photo by: LSU Athletics

5 LSU Candidates To Have Breakout Seasons For the Tigers in The 2026 Season

By KACE KIEISCHNICK | *Tiger Rag Staff Writer*

There are plenty of players to choose from for a high-five selection of projected breakout players, particularly when you consider LSU coach Lane Kiffin signed the No. 1 portal class in the nation in January with 41 players.

But here is our top five.

SAFETY

TY BENEFIELD

The Boise State transfer is the easiest choice to break out in his first season as a Tiger. Benefield (6-foot-3, 208 pounds) racked up 107 tackles with two interceptions and three pass breakups last season.

He garnered rave reviews from teammates, coaches and former Tigers in the spring. Kiffin called him one of the "ultra-elite" talents on the roster, and Benefield made it easy to see why. He has the physicality to be an enforcer in the box and the ball skills to be a hawk in the secondary.

WIDE RECEIVER

JACKSON HARRIS

Take your pick for a breakout in the crowded receiver room. Winnie Watkins has a history with Kiffin at Ole Miss. Tre' Wilson and Jayce Brown look the part, too. But Harris (6-2, 202) has a little bit of everything.

He was a four-star Stanford commit who broke out with 49 catches for 963 yards and 12 touchdowns at Hawaii last season. After learning Kiffin's offense, he will be a playmaker.

RUNNING BACK

DILIN JONES

Jones (5-11, 211) was Wisconsin's leading rusher with 300 yards in seven games before his season was cut short by turf toe. The former four-star has impressed enough in spring to earn time with the first team. He will likely not usurp Caden Durham and Harlem Berry, but he will get his chances.

"For a guy that wasn't a headliner, he played like it," Kiffin said.

EDGE RUSHER

JORDAN ROSS

Ross (6-5, 246) is a former five-star who could not find a place to shine at Tennessee. In 22 games, he recorded just 26 tackles and 1.5 sacks. But his 78.2 Pro Football Focus grade last season reflects his starting potential.

And his raw athleticism and length are hard to ignore.

OFFENSIVE GUARD

BO BORDELON

Bordelon (6-6, 305) may not be a flashy breakout star, but he is a necessary one. There might not have been a larger deficiency anywhere on the 2025 Tigers than the interior of the line.

He is a fifth-year senior who has failed to see significant playing time at LSU. But he took over at left guard in the spring and never looked back. His veteran experience and communication will be essential for a near completely revamped unit. TR

Photo by: LSU Athletics.

5 LSU FOOTBALL GAMES
That Will Define
The 2026 Season

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | *Tiger Rag Editor*

Don't blame me, if you read it or hear about it here first.

But LSU could be an excellent team in 2026 – a playoff team – and get off to a 2-2 start with little or no margin for error the rest of the way to reach the playoffs.

LSU's schedule in the SEC's new nine-game format is difficult, and the Tigers play their most league road games in history with five.

Here are the five games that will define LSU's season.

At No. 8
OLE MISS
Sept. 19, 6:30 p.m. (ABC)

Clemson is an attractive opener for LSU on Sept. 5, but the Tigers should win comfortably. And we all know the real opener will be the third Saturday of September in Oxford when The Grove becomes a satanic cult of hate for everything LSU and their LSU-loving traitor former coach, Lane Kiffin. Ole Miss will be so hyped, it could help LSU. Maybe the Rebels will hyperventilate. The key for LSU will be to not get overly emotional and keep itself in check, which bodes well for execution. Kiffin did an expert job of keeping his team on an even keel in winning his last five last year amid everyone knowing he was entertaining offers.

The Tigers can't leave it all in Oxford because of the following week.

No. 9
TEXAS A&M
Sept. 26

The Aggies could be the best team on LSU's schedule, and they have won two straight over the Tigers by an average of three touchdowns. LSU has A&M at home, but just one week after Armageddon at Ole Miss. This will not be a good Saturday to be emotionally hungover.

And as I said, Ole Miss and A&M could be so good in 2026 that LSU could lose both in close games and be 2-2. If that happens, the Tigers would still have a decent playoff shot via quality of loss, if the Rebels and Aggies stay highly ranked.

No. 5
TEXAS
Nov. 14

Alabama and Texas back-to-back after you've already played Ole Miss and Texas A&M on consecutive weeks is a lot to ask. If Kiffin has only two losses after this weekend, he will be earning his money.

No. 16
ALABAMA
Nov. 7

A rare Alabama game in Baton Rouge that is not LSU's feature home game of a season. And that's good, because LSU would be wise not to have its Post Bama Hangover with what is coming the next week.

At No. 25
TENNESSEE
Nov. 21

The SEC office didn't wish Kiffin – the first to coach three SEC schools - a happy honeymoon season by scheduling him against the two SEC schools he left on the road. The Vols would love nothing more than to be spoilers and keep their one-year coach of 2009 out of the playoffs.

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

CLEMSON 9/5

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney returns eight starters from a shockingly disappointing 7-6 team in 2025 and brought back 2011-14 offensive coordinator Chad Morris. The likely week one starting quarterback will be junior Christopher Vizinna, a five-star recruit who has spent three years as the Tigers' backup.

The defensive front replaces five of its top seven contributors and is led by senior defensive end Will Heldt, who posted 15.5 tackles for loss and 7.5 sacks last season. This season needs a reset for Swinney and his Tigers.

LOUISIANA TECH 9/12

Fifth-year head coach Sonny Cumbie leads the Bulldogs into their first season in the Sun Belt Conference. Louisiana Tech enjoyed its first winning campaign under Cumbie, going 8-5 last year.

Tech returns starting quarterbacks Blake Baker and Trey Kukuk. Both are running threats, but leave a lot to be desired in the pass game, finishing No.119 in the nation with 163.9 per game last year.

OLE MISS 9/19

First-year head coach Pete Golding and the Rebels will not be short on motivation.

Ole Miss new offensive coordinator John David Baker was the Rebels co-OC under coach Lane Kiffin in 2022 and '23 and pass game coordinator in 2021. He has returned after two seasons as East Carolina's OC. And he inherits what is likely the best returning backfield in the country in quarterback Trinidad Chambliss and running back Kewan Lacy.

With 10 starters back from a College Football Playoff semifinal squad, we shall see how well Golding and company do with so much talent left for them by Kiffin.

TEXAS A&M 9/26

Third-year coach Mike Elko and junior quarterback Marcel Reed are looking to make it back to the CFP after an 11-2 season in 2025. The Aggies return much of their offensive production, but only one starter from last year's offensive line returns in center/guard Mark Nabou Jr.

Elko lost SEC defensive player of the year Cashius Howell, a defensive end taken in the second round of the NFL Draft by Cincinnati. But there is experience in the secondary with a fresh haul of transfers to maintain the Aggies' defense.

MCNEESE STATE 10/3

McNeese is led by head coach Matt Viator in his second season back in Lake Charles after winning four conference titles with the Cowboys from 2006-2015 and going 5-7 last season. He was Louisiana-Monroe's head coach from 2016-20.

Junior quarterback Jake Strong returns after throwing for 2,008 yards and 11 TDs, but with 13 interceptions. Former LSU commitment and Miami transfer running back Tre'Vonte Citizen leads a rushing attack that ranked No. 17 in the FCS last season.

KENTUCKY 10/10

First-year coach Will Stein arrives from the Oregon offensive coordinator job, but he may not enjoy the same offensive talent or success he had there. He will rely heavily on his 33-man transfer class, starting with Notre Dame backup quarterback Kenny Minchey.

Former LSU OC Joe Sloan will lead a rebuilt offense. DC Jay Bateman has 10 starters returning from 2025.

A Brief Look At All LSU FOOTBALL OPPONENTS For The 2026 Season

MISSISSIPPI STATE 10/17

The Bulldogs finished with seven losses in eight games after a 4-0 start in coach Jeff Lebby's second season. If they can reverse that depends on sophomore quarterback Kamario Taylor, who played well in spots last year. Defensive coordinator Zach Arnett returns to the program to revitalize Lebby's stagnant defense.

AUBURN 10/24

South Florida coach Alex Golesh may be a good hire, particularly since he brought standout quarterback Byrum Brown with him. And Auburn needs offense bad and defense, too, as only three starters in all return.

ALABAMA 11/7

Kalen DeBoer's Alabama has become an enigma — statement wins, followed by as noteworthy losses. If he wants to break that cycle in year three, he'll need either Keelon Russell or Austin Mack to turn the page at quarterback. The Tide will be good. The question is whether they are good enough to be real contenders.

TEXAS 11/14

Texas is the preseason favorite to win the SEC, and for good reason. Despite a disappointing 2025, quarterback Arch Manning showed he is exactly as talented as many thought as he improved late in the season. This could be his breakout year as a junior. Coach Steve Sarkisian replaced six draft picks with a stacked transfer class headlined by Auburn receiver Cam Coleman. Edge Collin Simmons is back after 12 sacks in '25.

TENNESSEE 11/21

Josh Heupel brought in Penn State's Jim Knowles to fix another defensive disaster last season, but there will likely be growing pains. Five defensive starters are back, but none on the line. The Vols yet again have questions at QB, where either five-star freshman Faizon Brandon or redshirt freshman George MacIntyre will start.

ARKANSAS 11/28

Former Memphis coach Ryan Silverfield takes the reins in Fayetteville. Silverfield had six winning seasons at Memphis, but his prolific offense won't do much to help Arkansas' defensive woes. New coordinator Ron Roberts has only two returning starters on defense.

Photo by: LSU Athletics

THE 5 BIGGEST QUESTIONS Entering Lane Kiffin's 1st Season At LSU

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | *Tiger Rag Editor*

Here are the top five questions surrounding LSU football as the Tigers and new coach Lane Kiffin enter the school's 132nd season on Sept. 6 against Clemson in Tiger Stadium.

1. Will LSU make the College Football Playoff?

It has been a long six seasons since the Tigers were last in a playoff game, which was a 42-25 victory over No. 3 Clemson by No. 1 LSU on Jan. 13, 2020, in the CFP national championship game in the Superdome. A non-winning season followed in 2020 at 5-5, a losing campaign in 2021 at 6-7 and the third season over that span of five or more losses last year at 7-6.

My answer is yes, at 10-2 and 7-2 with losses to Ole Miss and Texas.

2. Will LSU win the national championship this season?

No. But it will be fun watching the Tigers finally play at an elite level with a chance to contend for the national title, and they may make the semifinals. LSU will undoubtedly meet a great team or two in the playoffs should they advance. Enjoy the ride.

3. Will new quarterback Sam Leavitt's right foot be good to go following surgery last year?

He may not be so nimble and quick through the first few games, but he will still be very effective. And he's a much better passer than runner anyway. And remember, the last LSU quarterback to have the same injury was Matt Mauck midway through the 2002 season. He threw a then-school record 28 touchdowns in leading the Tigers to the national championship in the 2003 season.

4. Will LSU really have its first significant running back-driven rushing attack since 2019 in 2026?

Yes. Kiffin always had a decent or very good running game in his six seasons at Ole Miss. Considering the offensive line he has built at LSU, particularly with the portal additions, and a decent group of running backs, it will happen.

5. Will Lane Kiffin tweet again?

Yes. Kiffin will end his ban on tweeting that started shortly after the Vanity Fair article about him published on May 11.

I'm betting he tweets about Ole Miss shortly before the Tigers and Rebels kick off on Sept. 19 in Oxford. And the Rebel Nation may just hyperventilate in unison.

THE 12-GAME PATH FOR THE TIGERS

Breaking The Season Into Quadrants ... And A Little Lagniappe

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | *Tiger Rag Editor*

An LSU fan base starved for its first playoff since 2019 – with just four teams and a full five years before the 12-team format - will clearly have its best chance since this season.

New coach Lane Kiffin has assembled one of the most talented teams in the country via a consensus No. 1-ranked portal class of 41 in addition to a good, 13th ranked signing class that will have a few members impacting as well. He also inherits one of the best rising defensive coordinators in the country in Blake Baker, who returns several key players to go with some gems on the front line added by Kiffin.

In a normal season, you could pencil the Tigers into the playoffs. But this is the first edition of the nine-game Southeastern Conference schedule, and LSU has five on the road for the first time. LSU could be excellent in 2026 and not quite make the playoffs. But if Kiffin can quickly merge the talent into one consistent force, the Tigers will be playing on Dec. 18 or 19 in the College Football Playoff.

We have divided the season into four quadrants with one lagniappe game.

PRESEASON

Clemson, Louisiana Tech

Clemson is coming off its worst season at 7-6 since a 6-7 mark in coach Dabo Swinney's second year in 2010. An attractive opener (6:30 p.m., ABC) on Sept. 5 in Tiger Stadium, but No. 10 LSU (7-6, 3-5 SEC) would be better with a rent-a-win for a true preseason game as Kiffin gets the kinks out of his talent. Still, the Tigers should handle this with minimal stress.

Then it's a nice tuneup on Sept. 12 in Louisiana Tech, which was 8-5 and 5-3 last season with a 23-7 loss at LSU.

TITANIC TWO-GAME TEST

At No. 8 Ole Miss, No. 9 Texas A&M

The Rebels (13-2, 7-1, CFP semifinalist) and Aggies (11-2, 7-1, CFP qualifier) may be the best two on LSU's schedule. A split either way would be fine, because either will be a quality loss through season's end. The ultimate grudge match between Kiffin and his former team and ex-defensive coordinator Pete Golding will be in prime time on Sept. 19 (6:30 p.m., ABC). Then the Aggies in Tiger Stadium on Sept. 26.

OCTOBER BREATHER

McNeese, At Kentucky, Mississippi State, At Auburn, Open

October always has the best weather in Louisiana with cooler, true football fall temperatures. And the living will be mostly easy for LSU, but be careful at Auburn on Oct. 24 before the Halloween open date.

FORTNIGHT FROM HELL

No. 16 Alabama, No. 5 Texas, At No. 25 Tennessee

LSU's schedule is so rich that Bama in Tiger Stadium on Nov. 7 is an afterthought amid Ole Miss, A&M and Texas. Alabama is not what it was under Nick Saban, but Kalen DeBoer still has a lot of roster talent.

Just a week later, the Longhorns and Arch Manning - the third Manning QB to enter Tiger Stadium after Archie (1968, '70) and Eli (2001-02) of Ole Miss – hit Baton Rouge. Each was 1-1. It will be Texas' first game in Baton Rouge since 1953.

Splits with Ole Miss and A&M and Bama and Texas would have LSU at 8-2 and 5-2 and needing to win out to make the playoffs. The Vols will be spoiler danger on Nov. 21 in Knoxville, but they don't have the talent.

LAGNIAPPE

At Arkansas

After those three, a respite blowout in Fayetteville will be in order for a 10-2, 7-2 finish that will get LSU in the CFP at last, hopefully without a trip to the Jurassic SEC title game on Dec. 5.

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Living in South Louisiana has its perks - good food, friendly people, and beautiful outdoor spaces. But it also comes with its fair share of bugs. From mosquitoes and fire ants to spiders, wasps, and even stinging caterpillars, bites and stings are a part of life down here, especially during the warmer months.

While most bug bites are harmless and go away on their own, some can cause reactions that are painful, itchy, or even serious. And in this heat and humidity, even a small bite can quickly become irritated or infected if not properly treated.

Common Symptoms of Bug Bites and Rashes

Most minor bites will cause:

- Itching or minor swelling
- Redness or a small raised bump
- Localized discomfort

These symptoms can often be managed at home with antihistamines, hydrocortisone cream, or cold compresses. However, sometimes things can take a turn, and that's when urgent care can help.

When to Visit Urgent Care

It's a good idea to seek medical attention if:

- The bite or rash is rapidly spreading or looks infected (think: pus, red streaks, increased swelling or pain)
- You're experiencing symptoms beyond the bite area, like fever, headache, body aches, or swollen lymph nodes
- The bite is near the eyes, mouth, or other sensitive areas
- A tick bit you, and you're concerned about a possible tick-borne illness
- You're having signs of an allergic reaction - like hives, facial swelling, difficulty breathing, or dizziness

Stay Safe Outdoors

To help prevent bites and rashes:

- Use insect repellent when outside
- Wear long sleeves and pants when hiking or working in the yard
- Check for ticks after spending time in wooded or grassy areas
- Avoid scratching bites, which can increase the risk of infection

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LSU FOOTBALL OPERATIONS OFFICE

General Manager Wunderkind Billy Glasscock Among Highest Paid In Nation

Billy Glasscock
Photo by: Ole Miss Athletics

By GLENN GUILBEAU | *Tiger Rag Editor*

Back in 2008, LSU football general manager Billy Glasscock was 32 and the offensive coordinator at Arizona Western, a junior college in Yuma.

And he decided to take the 3:10 (Out Of) Yuma, instead of (To), which is what the 2007 remake (with Russell Crowe) of the 1957 classic train western is titled.

Glasscock, a native of Bloomington, Illinois, bet on himself, and that wager has kept paying out, reaching $1 million last December when he took the 3:10 To Baton Rouge … from Oxford, Mississippi.

"I got connected with Coach Kill," Glasscock said in a story in 2016 when he was director of recruiting at the University of Minnesota.

Glasscock does not have mafia ties, as far as we know, but, "I got connected with coach Kill," sure sounds like it could be in a Martin Scorsese classic.

But Coach Kill is not a hit man's code name. Jerry Kill was Northern Illinois' head football coach from 2008-10.

"He didn't have any paid positions, but he was looking for guys to help," Glasscock said in 2016. "I left a full-time job as offensive coordinator at Arizona Western to work for free for him."

Glasscock helped Kill with coffee, recruiting and as assistant strength coach, eventually drawing a salary. After Kill went 7-6 and 5-3 in the Mid-American Conference in 2009 and 10-3 and 8-0 in 2010 with some players courtesy of Glasscock, Kill got the head coaching job at Minnesota. And he took Glasscock with him as director of recruiting.

Kill and Glasscock and others turned around Minnesota to a pair of 8-5 seasons in 2013 and '14. Glasscock through a 9-4 season in 2016 before taking a more lucrative director of player personnel position at North Carolina State.

"Glasscock has spearheaded a recruiting effort that has sent Minnesota to four straight bowl appearances, while embracing the ever-expanding intricacies of evaluating high school prospects," that 2016 story said of Glasscock.

After 2017-20 at NC State, he moved on to the same job at Texas from 2021-23 before Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin made him general manager in 2024. In 2025, Glasscock made $425,000. He followed Kiffin to LSU last December with a $3 million contract over three years and is now one of the highest paid GMs in college football.

Glasscock works in player acquisition and retention and salary cap management. He helped Kiffin assemble the No. 1 portal class in 2024, No. 2 in '25 and No. 1 at LSU in 2026.

"It's worked extremely well with Billy and I," Kiffin said recently. "I know that I can get on a plane to go recruiting, and everything will be handled extremely well in this building. To put together the rosters the way we did, and now come here and turn this the way we did, at least on paper so far, is awesome. I think he's as good as they come in the entire country."

Glasscock, 50, oversees at LSU an army of 10 various player personnel and recruiting assistants, who have positions not unlike those he had in his career – J.R. Belton, Adam Clark, Thaddeus Rivers, Tyler Veeins, Mike Williams, Jeff Martin, Austin Shelton, Arl St. Cyr, Sam Petitto and Dwike Wilson.

As GM, he and Kiffin run LSU's personnel department like an NFL team.

"If you want the answers of how to do something in college football, usually just look to the NFL," Kiffin said. "Why not have a GM who can help you run the entire building? TR

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Lane Kiffin
Photo by: Ole Miss Athletics

LET'S GET DOWN TO BRASS TACKS

LSU Will Finish 10-2 And 7-2 In The SEC And Make The Playoffs

By GLENN GUILBEAU | *Tiger Rag Editor*

One of LSU football coach Lane Kiffin's biggest critics is ESPN and SEC Network star Paul Finebaum.

Finebaum said with great clarity on SEC Nation the night before SEC Media Days started in Tampa in July what many throughout the national media, some local and regional media and many LSU fans have been saying for months.

"What are the expectations you have for Kiffin in year one?" Finebaum was asked by SEC Nation host Matt Barrie.

"CFP," Finebaum said. "It's really simple."

LSU has not made the CFP – the College Football Playoff – since the 2019 season when the Tigers won the national championship.

"And if he fails to do that, the human cry will be loud and vociferous," Finebaum said. "But that is the expectation, because not only the money paid to him ($13.5 million a year in a seven-year, $91 million contract), but the money paid to the players."

It has been estimated that LSU's various collective and NIL money sources have shelled out between $30 and $40 million for its 2026 roster. That includes the No. 1 portal class in the country with 41 transfers, including No. 1 quarterback Sam Leavitt of Arizona State at an estimated $5 million. No. 1 offensive tackle Jordan Seaton of Colorado and No. 1 edge rusher Prince Umanmielen of Ole Miss likely have multi-million dollar deals as well.

"Nobody did better in the portal," Finebaum said. "He's got players across the board, and it's incumbent to get there (to the playoffs). Now, if he doesn't, as much as I would like to say, 'Lane Kiffin ought to be fired,' he's not going to be. It's not even going to be close."

But Finebaum quickly pulled back on his "ought to be fired" hypothetical.

"I say that jokingly because Kiffin has so much good will right now that even a subpar season is not going to change fan optimism for the future," he said.

This is true. LSU coach Jay Johnson had one of the worst seasons in school baseball history in 2026 at 30-28 and 9-21 in the SEC, and he still retains huge popularity as he just won national championships in 2023 and '25. LSU men's basketball coach Will Wade may have more goodwill than even Kiffin, so much so that he could withstand a poor season in 2025-26 and still remain immensely popular … for a while anyway.

But Kiffin will win enough to reach the CFP this season – 10-2 in the regular season to be exact with a 7-2 mark in the SEC.

LSU will catch a break by not making the SEC Championship Game on Dec. 5 in Atlanta as Texas and Georgia will play in that. So, the Tigers will be fresh for their playoff opener on Dec. 19 in Tiger Stadium against 12-1 Tulane. … LSU 31, Tulane 14.

The Tigers will then beat defending national champion Indiana, 28-27, to reach the semifinals, where they will lose to Ohio State, 24-20.

Kiffin has tried to temper optimism among LSU fans since signing the No. 1 portal class, but he knows how talented his roster is.

"I don't know how fast it's going to happen," Kiffin said on former LSU great Tyrann Mathieu's "In The Bayou" podcast in June. "But we're going to win a national championship. I don't know how fast. It might not be today, but it's going to happen." TR

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2026 PREDICTIONS

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BY THE NUMBERS

10 Digits That Will Define LSU's Season

Could These All Add Up To The Playoffs?

By **KACE KIEISCHNICK**, Tiger Rag Staff Writer

59.26% That is the percentage of the LSU roster that was not on the team last year — 64 of the 108 total players. There are five returning starters on offense, four on defense. This is a new era of LSU football under Lane Kiffin.

483 The number of rushing yards LSU gave up to quarterbacks in 2025. That jumps to 515, or 42 yards per game when the -32 yards by Western Kentucky are removed. With games against Ole Miss's Trinidad Chambliss and Texas A&M's Marcel Reed in weeks three and four, the Tigers will need to be better right away.

297 Three players on this LSU defense combined for 297 tackles in 2025 on three teams. Linebacker Dahvon Keys had 92 for LSU. Linebacker TJ Dottery led the SEC with 98 stops for Ole Miss. And safety Ty Benefield was No. 1 in the Mountain West with 107 tackles for Boise State. Factor in the 124 tackles a healthy Whit Weeks made in 2024, and a nightmare for opposing backs is brewing in Death Valley.

198 Kiffin and offensive coordinator Charlie Weis Jr. ran the ball 576 times last year at Ole Miss, while LSU rushed 378 times - a difference of 198. The Rebels did play two more games, but take away the 48 carries in those two, and Ole Miss rushes still outnumber LSU's by 150. Welcome to the Lane Train rushing attack.

21 A first-year head coach at an FBS program has led his team to nine or more regular season wins 21 times in the College Football Playoff era. Kiffin will need to make the 2026 Tigers the 22nd team to achieve that feat, if he wants a shot at the College Football Playoffs.

16.08 The average yards per catch of this year's LSU receivers in the 2025 season at other schools. Compare that to the 10.92 mark LSU wideouts recorded last season, and the difference in the potential offense is apparent. Expect Kiffin's unit to be much more explosive than the '25 Tigers.

11 Trey'Dez Green's 11 touchdowns are already an LSU record for tight ends. But if LSU's offense is going to put points on the board, it will need its top red zone threat to produce as much as ever.

9 Edge rusher Princewill Umanmielen tallied nine sacks at Ole Miss last season. Linebacker Harold Perkins led LSU with four in 2025. An edge like Umanmielen will be a difference maker for Blake Baker's defense.

5 That is how many sacks projected starting tackles Jordan Seaton (at Colorado) and Weston Davis (at LSU) allowed in 1,060 snaps last season. LSU's offense starts with these two bookends.

2 The total number of FBS starts made by LSU cornerbacks not named DJ Pickett or PJ Woodland. Both were made by redshirt junior Ja'Keem Jackson at Florida in 2023. After LSU sophomore Aidan Anding went down with an Achilles injury during spring camp, the Tigers will need to avoid any more injuries and rely on someone else in the room to step up.

Photo by: LSU Athletics

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OFFENSE

	STARTER	BACKUP
WIDE RECEIVER (X)	1 JAYCE BROWN SR	2 TRE' BROWN JR
WIDE RECEIVER (Z)	4 JACKSON HARRIS JR	88 MALIK ELZY JR
WIDE RECEIVER (Slot)	6 WINNIE WATKINS SO	3 EUGENE "TRE" WILSON III JR
TIGHT END	14 TREY'DEZ GREEN JR	12 MALACHI THOMAS JR
LEFT TACKLE	77 JORDAN SEATON JR	65 SEAN THOMPKINS JR
LEFT GUARD	67 BO BORDELON SR	70 DEVIN HARPER SO
CENTER	61 BRAELIN MOORE SR	50 WILLIAM SATTERWHITE II SO
RIGHT GUARD	55 ALIOU BAH SR	52 JA'QUAN SPRINKLE JR
RIGHT TACKLE	75 WESTON DAVIS SO	69 DARRIN STREY FR
QUARTERBACK	10 SAM LEAVITT JR	6 HUSAN LONGSTREET FR
RUNNING BACK	22 HARLEM BERRY SO OR 29 CADEN DURHAM JR	13 DILIN JONES SO
PUNTER	90 GRANT CHADWICK JR	99 HAYDEN CRAIG FR
KICKER	80 SCOTT STARZYK SO	45 SEAN PERRET FR
LONG SNAPPER	43 SILAS HALL SO	39 MACK MULHEARN FR

2026 PROJECTE

TIGER RAG'S

DEFENSE

	STARTER	BACKUP
EDGE	29 JORDAN ROSS JR	93 JAYLEN BROWN SO
TACKLE	47 MALIK BLOCTON JR	99 DUECE GERALDS FR
TACKLE	96 DOMINICK MCKINLEY JR	88 RICHARD ANDERSON FR
EDGE	1 PRINCEWILL UMANMIELEN SR	55 LAMAR BROWN FR
WILL LB	6 TJ DOTTERY SR	42 DAVHON KEYS JR
MIDDLE LB	40 WHIT WEEKS SR	24 TYLEN SINGLETON SO
STAR	10 DASHAWN SPEARS JR	31 CJ JIMCOILY SO
LEFT CB	3 DJ PICKETT SO	8 JA'KEEM JACKSON JR
FREE SAFETY	2 TY BENEFIELD SR	13 FAHEEM DELANE SO
STR. SAFETY	0 TAMARCUS COOLEY JR	28 JHASE THOMAS FR
RIGHT CB	11 PJ WOODLAND JR	21 MICHAEL TURNER SO

ED DEPTH CHART

BREAKING OUT FROM THE CROWD

Amid So Many New Tigers From The Portal And Recruiting Class, Here Are 6 Who May Shine

By **KACE KIEISCHNICK** | *Tiger Rag Staff Writer*

In a blockbuster, No. 1 ranked class of 41 transfers and the No. 13 recruiting class of 16 true freshmen and three junior college signees, here are six top under-the-radar newcomers and freshmen who could make an impact.

DE LAMAR BROWN

Brown (6-foot-4, 295 pounds) is the top-rated recruit LSU welcomes to campus as a true freshman. He was listed as Rivals' and ESPN's top overall prospect. The edge rusher was a five-star on both the offensive and defensive lines. He made 29 tackles, nine for loss, three sacks and forced two fumbles at University High in 2025.

Brown did not enroll in January and missed spring drills, but he will still force his way into action sooner or later.

DTs RICHARD ANDERSON & DEUCE GERALDS

It really is unfair to lump these two true freshmen together, but both will have big roles on the interior of the defensive front. Anderson (6-3, 339) is a five-star Karr High prospect considered the No. 1 defensive lineman in the nation, and he went through spring practice as an early enrollee.

Geralds (6-1, 279) was a four-star recruit, but has also already gotten time with the starting unit in practice as did Anderson.

"This guy's going to be a great player. It's just a matter of time to when that happens. And love how physical he is, love how hard he's worked," coach Lane Kiffin said of Anderson.

"Deuce has really been extremely productive and caused havoc," Kiffin said. "He's going to be a great player."

CB HAVON FINNEY JR.

Behind starters DJ Pickett and PJ Woodland, cornerback is the thinnest position on the team. Defensive coordinator Blake Baker is looking for depth, and another true freshman in Finney could answer the call.

Finney (6-1, 173) was the No. 1 cornerback in the class of 2027, but he reclassified to come to LSU early. If he can mature quickly, he has enough potential to stay ahead of schedule.

TE MALACHI THOMAS

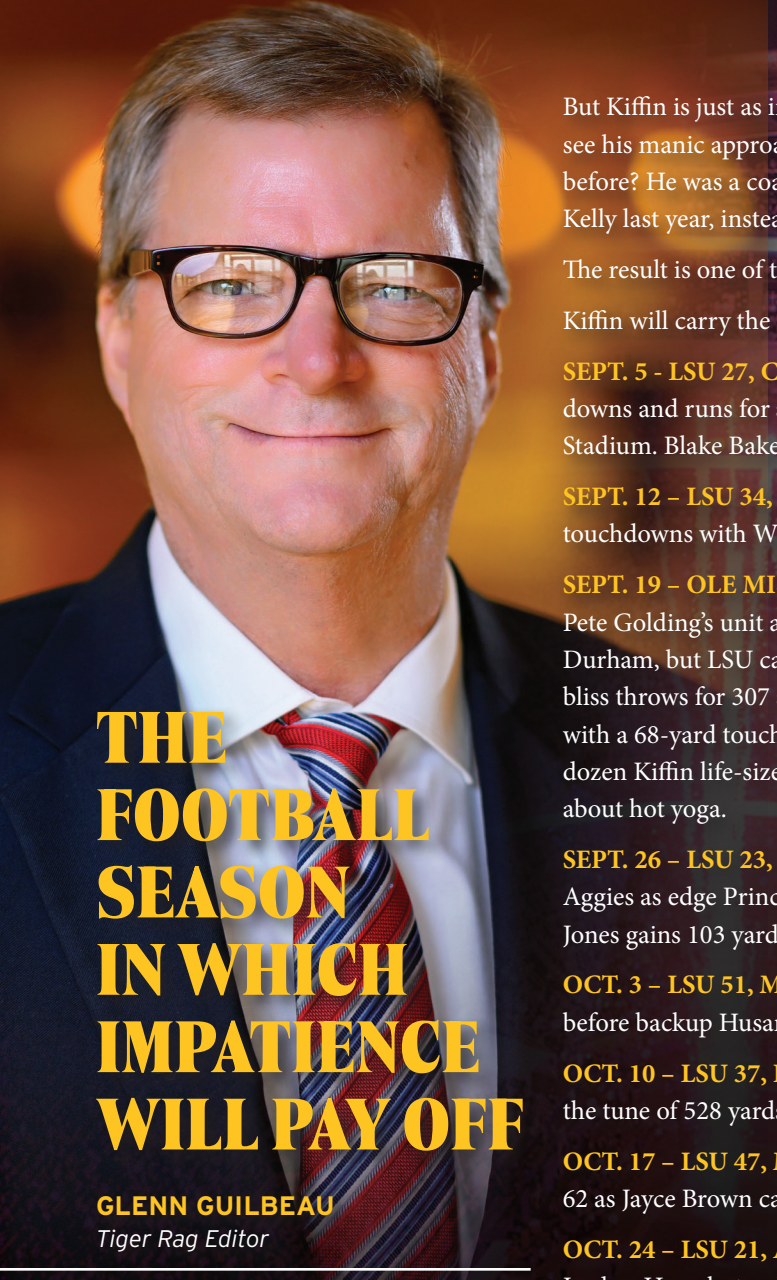
Junior Trey'Dez Green is the preseason All-American tight end, but that does not mean Thomas, a transfer from Pittsburgh, needs to live in his shadow as a junior. Thomas (6-3, 242) caught just 13 passes for 192 yards and two TDs at Pitt last year as a sophomore. But with 26 games played, he has experience, and has shown enough versatility to be more than another body on the end of the offensive line.

Kiffin asks a lot of tight ends and knows how to feature them. All Thomas needs to do is take advantage.

WR TRE' BROWN

Brown (6-2, 190) was one of the most prolific deep threats in the nation at Old Dominion last year as a sophomore. His 20.05 yards per catch ranked seventh in the nation after 38 receptions for 762 yards and four touchdowns. That kind of explosiveness does not just disappear, even when making the jump from the Sun Belt to the SEC.

The receiver room is packed with new talent. It will be hard to break through the crowd, but if Brown can make it onto the field, he could make game-changing plays. TR



THE FOOTBALL SEASON IN WHICH IMPATIENCE WILL PAY OFF

GLENN GUILBEAU
Tiger Rag Editor

Forget about how starved LSU football fans are for their College Football Playoff since 2019. Forget about how impatient they are for a home playoff game.

LSU's administration and donors want to win yesterday, too, because of the $91 million over seven years it will be doling out to new coach Lane Kiffin on the heels of paying off fired coach Brian Kelly nearly $54 million in a buyout.

Kiffin's new roster of 41 portal players and 19 via the 2026 signing class cost reportedly more than $40 million.

No, this is not a rebuilding year. This is "Restoration On The Bayou" on the SEC Network. And it's all about the now and the money.

But Kiffin is just as impatient as any foaming-at-the-mouth LSU fan. Or did you not see his manic approach to the portal and complete revamp of LSU's roster like never before? He was a coach possessed as if he was in his win-or-get-fired season like Kelly last year, instead of his honeymoon.

The result is one of the most talented rosters in the country.

Kiffin will carry the same sense of urgency into the season.

SEPT. 5 - LSU 27, CLEMSON 10: New quarterback Sam Leavitt throws two touchdowns and runs for a third as his injured right foot looks good in front of a full Tiger Stadium. Blake Baker's defense shuts out Clemson until the third quarter.

SEPT. 12 – LSU 34, LOUISIANA TECH 7: Leavitt throws for 312 yards and three touchdowns with Winnie Watkins catching a 77-yard touchdown.

SEPT. 19 – OLE MISS 34, LSU 31: Ole Miss defensive coordinator/head coach Pete Golding's unit allows 298 passing yards to Leavitt and 108 rushing to Caden Durham, but LSU can't stop the players left by Kiffin. Quarterback Trinidad Chambliss throws for 307 and rushes for 82, while running back Kewan Lacy gains 128 with a 68-yard touchdown in the final moments for the win in a rocking Oxford. A dozen Kiffin life-sized replica dolls burn throughout the night in The Grove. Talk about hot yoga.

SEPT. 26 – LSU 23, TEXAS A&M 13: Baker's defense recovers and dominates the Aggies as edge Princewill Umanmielen sacks Marcel Reed twice. Running back Dilin Jones gains 103 yards on 22 carries as the Tigers go Old School.

OCT. 3 – LSU 51, MCNEESE STATE 7: Leavitt throws for 287 and two touchdowns before backup Husan Longstreet completes 10 of 12 for another 111 and a TD.

OCT. 10 – LSU 37, KENTUCKY 10: Kiffin and Weis' offense keeps on clicking to the tune of 528 yards in Lexington.

OCT. 17 – LSU 47, MISSISSIPPI STATE 13: Leavitt throws for 300 and rushes for 62 as Jayce Brown catches three touchdowns of more than 40 yards.

OCT. 24 – LSU 21, AUBURN 17: Leavitt throws two interceptions in the first half at Jordan-Hare, but redeems himself by driving LSU 76 yards in six plays over the final minute, hitting Jackson Harris for a 17-yard touchdown with 14 seconds left.

NOV. 7 – LSU 31, ALABAMA 21: Trailing 24-21, Alabama drives inside LSU's 30 in the final minutes, but safety Ty Benefield intercepts quarterback Austin Mack and returns it 85 yards for a TD. The Tigers (8-1, 5-1 SEC) win their sixth straight and jump to No. 3 in the nation.

NOV. 14 – TEXAS 28, LSU 21: The No. 1 Longhorns are too much for the Tigers as Arch Manning throws three TDs and becomes the third Manning to win in Tiger Stadium after grandpa Archie in 1968 and uncle Eli in 2001.

NOV. 21 – LSU 38, TENNESSEE 17: The Tigers face a playoff-dangerous third loss as the Vols take a 14-3 lead at the half. But adjustments by Kiffin and offensive coordinator Charlie Weis Jr. work wonders as Leavitt throws four touchdowns in the second half.

NOV. 28 – LSU 41, ARKANSAS 0: Dilin Jones runs it down the throat of the Hogs for 148 yards on 21 carries, and Baker's defense holds Arkansas to 102 total yards.

The No. 3 Tigers (10-2, 7-2) will host No. 20 Tulane (11-1, 7-1 American Athletic Conference) on Dec. 19 in the first playoff game ever in Tiger Stadium.

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Finally some fire from SEC Media Days on Day 1!

"I certainly hope that our fans haven't cooled off, whether it's the grocery stores stocked up on mustard, or the sportis stores that they've got reinforcements on the golf balls, hopefully Knoxville is ready for his arrival"

Tennessee head Josh Heupel with the heat when asked about Lane Kiffin's return to Knoxville

RIVALS
@Rivals

FONG BOMB: Rivals' @SWiltfong_ has logged an expert prediction for LSU to flip Texas Five-Star Plus+ WR commit Easton Royal

SAM HUTCHENS
@Sam_Hutchens

Ole Miss is considering court as an option to get unpaid buyout payments from LSU football transfers Princewill Umanmielen and Devin Harper.

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Two days in a row now that someone on the SEC Network has said it's "National Championship or Bust" for Lane Kiffin and #LSU.

This season is gonna be so much fun

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Ranking The SEC Football Coaches From 1-16

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

It's not summer without a ranking of the Southeastern Conference football coaches. And we're off.

Editor's Note: *For explanations on all 16, go to - https://www.tigerrag.com/where-do-rookie-pete-golding-and-lane-kiffin-rank-among-sec-coaches/*

1. KIRBY SMART, Georgia – Just four years ago, Smart appeared to be the next Nick Saban with back-to-back national titles in 2021 and '22. Since then, no titles, but he still leads all other league coaches in national titles at 2-0.

2. STEVE SARKISIAN, Texas – Sarkisian keeps getting closer with two playoff appearances. This may be his best chance to go all the way with quarterback Arch Manning as a junior.

3. LANE KIFFIN, LSU – Few thought anyone could do at Ole Miss what Kiffin did from 2020-25. Remember, the Rebels that Kiffin inherited had four asterisks next to their season records from 2010-16 for NCAA violations. Then Matt Luke had three straight losing SEC seasons. After breaking even at 5-5 in 2020, Kiffin took flight, winning double-figure games in four of the next five years. No one won so consistently at Ole Miss since Johnny Vaught in the late 1950s and early '60s.

Before Kiffin's four double-digit win seasons in five years, Ole Miss won 10 exactly one time from 1972-2014. That's called degree of difficulty. Look out, Sarkisian and Smart, another Son of Saban is about to start making a lot of noise.

4. KALEN DEBOER, Alabama – DeBoer is good, but not Bama good. If Sons of Saban Smart, Sarkisian and Kiffin start winning bigger than DeBoer, that will irk the Bama Nation to no end and hasten his exit.

5. CLARK LEA, Vanderbilt – Give this guy a major job, and he may prove to be the best in the country. Last year, he did become the first Vanderbilt coach in history to win 10 games in a season, and only two won nine.

… AND THE REST

6. MIKE ELKO, Texas A&M

7. JOSH HEUPEL, Tennessee

8. ELI DRINKWITZ, Missouri

9. JON SUMRALL, Florida

10. BRENT VENABLES, Oklahoma

11. SHANE BEAMER, South Carolina

12. RYAN SILVERFIELD, Arkansas

13. ALEX GOLESH, Auburn

14. JEFF LEBBY, Mississippi State

15. PETE GOLDING, Ole Miss

16. WILL STEIN, Kentucky TR

Frustration Purged After 2 Near Titles! LSU Wins SEC For 1st Time Since 1970

(Reprinted from Nov. 22, 1986, Tiger Rag Magazine)

By J.R. BALL, Staff Writer

STARKVILLE, Mississippi - LSU's 47-0 win at Mississippi State to clinch a share of the SEC title – its first since 1970 – Saturday night set off a burst of emotion that included even the normally reserved third-year head coach Bill Arnsparger.

No. 12 LSU (7-2, 5-1 SEC) finally escaped the close-but-no-cigar shadow that has hounded the Tigers the last two years.

"This is the biggest win since I've been at LSU," an emotionally charged Arnsparger said. "That was for the championship."

Safety Steve Rehage got so caught up that he almost reinjured himself when a stray sugar cube bounced off his face. The senior had been sidelined since the 28-17 win at Florida with a knee injury and made his return against State with an interception.

"I was trying to catch sugar cubes fans were throwing," Rehage said. "One of them hit me in the nose. I thought for a second it was broken."

LSU's defensive linemen – mainly fifth-year seniors – carried seven-year defensive line coach Pete Jenkins off the field, and Jenkins was awarded a game ball.

"This means a lot to me," a misty-eyed Jenkins said. "All the frustration of the last two years culminated in this win tonight."

The win marked the first time LSU beat Alabama and Mississippi State in the same season since 1970 – the last time LSU won the SEC title.

"After the last two years, I was beginning to think I wasn't ever going to win one," Rehage said.

"I love it. I love it, and I wear a size 11 ring," redshirt freshman quarterback Tommy Hodson said.

"The program under Arnsparger has gotten where we expect to win," linebacker Ron Sancho said.

With good reason. LSU under Arnsparger is 13-3-2 (.722 winning percentage) in the SEC in three seasons and 12-1-1 (.857) in all road games.

LSU will be favored in its next two games before a likely Sugar Bowl.

But Arnsparger was not thinking about the future.

"This is the most satisfying win I've had since I've been at LSU," he said. TR

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Statistically Speaking

JIM ENGSTER
President, Tiger Rag Magazine

Door is Open for Lane Kiffin to Rule the Valley and Louisiana

Fabled muckraker Jack Anderson became legend writing about intrigue in Washington D.C. His space was called the Washington Merry-Go-Round, and it became the most widely read syndicated column in American history.

For 35 years, Anderson dished the latest gossip about government maneuvers, and he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1972. Anderson relished the ire of his foes and earned a spot on President Nixon's enemies list. Jack Anderson spoke at the LSU Union in 1978 as Tiger Rag was beginning.

As a sophomore journalism student, I was pondering what it would be like for Anderson to be on the beat in Baton Rouge. Sometimes strange things happen, and there is a story behind and beyond the surface. Here is the latest example of a development in our backyard that Anderson would love.

The revelation that McNeese President Mike Reese plans to stay in the Louisiana Senate for the remainder of his term drew minimal reaction a few weeks ago. Senator Reese's decision to represent District 30 while running his university could have sweeping implications.

On the final day of the 2026 regular session, the House and Senate passed Act 790 to expand current law to mitigate any challenge to Reese under the dual office holding provision.

Professors are exhorted to refrain from political speech that might reflect poorly on their employers and are presumably still prohibited from being one of the chosen 144 legislators ensconced at the State Capitol. But Reese is not the first exception of a campus guru dabbling in matters of state.

Former LSU Associate Athletic Director Donald Ray Kennard was a Louisiana lawmaker for eight terms during his 38 years at the Ole War Skule. This was a loophole allowed for athletic department employees to serve at the House that Huey built, meaning there is a chance for Louisiana's highest-paid public official, Lane Kiffin, to moonlight in politics. Sounds doubtful, but with Kiffin, we never know.

Never has an LSU coach entered the political arena while leading the Tigers. Still, a precedent is established for high level positions with Reese in charge of the campus at Lake Charles and simultaneously chairing a legislative committee in Baton Rouge examining higher education funding.

It is a delicious prospect for the LSU coach to weigh after he leads his Tigers to the promised land this fall. Should the Lane Train capture a national championship as many anticipate, he will reign as the most popular person in Louisiana in time for the 2027 statewide election cycle.

There appears no obstacle to prevent Lane from running for office and serving as an elected official while coaching the Tigers. Former Gov. John McKeithen was accused of operating a recruiting office at the mansion from 1964-72. Soon we may have the LSU head coach residing in the governor's house as he directs the Bengals on the field.

Kiffin is a publicity magnet and knows how to garner national fascination with his every step. Because of a new precedent from Senator Reese of McNeese, anything is possible. Former Gov. Mike Foster was also a law student at Southern University during his second term, and few constituents complained.

Lane would generate a bonanza of media focus with LSU playing the third Saturday in October next year, and its coach being judged by voters at the ballot box on the same night.

If victorious, Kiffin could have access to resources to fund his program with taxpayers applauding his goal to break Nick Saban's record of seven national titles. Lane is a man on the move who is constantly seeking his next conquest. We must not rule out a government post for the choice of Gov. Jeff Landry to enhance the most significant brand name in Louisiana---LSU Football. Although the current governor might encourage Lane to wait until 2031 to avail himself of this opportunity.

Only the Strong Survive in the SEC

Thirty-eight years have passed since Tommy Hodson connected with Eddie Fuller in the Earthquake Game at Tiger Stadium on October 8 as LSU nipped the War Eagles 7-6. Seismic readings reached record levels for an athletic contest.

The roars and rumbles of 1988 will be challenged by the cacophony to accompany Lane Kiffin as he sprints from the locker room on September 3rd when LSU hosts Clemson in the season opener at the real Death Valley.

The game is vital for a blissful honeymoon for a program with the largest budget of any football factory in the country. A loss to Clemson is unacceptable. Even Brian Kelly won an opener on the road against the same foe last year. LK knows what happened to BK seven games later.

Kelly was 1-3 in season openers, losing twice to Florida State and once to USC before whipping Dabo Swinney in 2025.

In the 21st Century, Nick Saban was 4-1 in season openers at LSU; Les Miles was 11-1 with this lone defeat at Wisconsin in 2016. He was fired three games later.

Ed Orgeron was 3-2 in openers at LSU to give the Tigers a 19-7 record in season debuts 2000-25. No LSU team has secured a national championship without victory in the opening game of the season.

In this century, LSU ranks third among conference members in SEC football championships with five titles in 2001, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2019. Alabama has nine SEC crowns since 2000; Georgia has six; Florida and Auburn have won three league titles.

The same five members have reached the pinnacle in the nation since 2000. Alabama boasts six national football titles; LSU has three; Florida and Georgia have won twice and Auburn once.

Welcome Back Tulane

Tulane returns to the LSU football schedule in four years as the Greenies and Tigers are slated to play on Aug. 31, 2030. The Green Wave has been resurgent in recent years and may present a tougher challenge than in recent matchups with its rival up the river.

The last time Tulane defeated LSU was in 1982 when Vince Gibson's troops scored a stunning upset over Orange Bowl bound LSU at Tiger Stadium. The 31-28 shocker was a downer as LSU was already slated to face might Nebraska in Miami.

The Battle for the Rag started on Nov. 25,1983 as Tulane blanked the Bengals 34-0. The last time the schools competed in football, LSU prevailed 42-0 on Halloween of 2009.

LSU leads the series 69-22-7. Both universities were charter members of the SEC in 1932. Tulane left the conference 60 years ago.

The Greenies won the SEC title in 1934, 1939 and 1949. With three league crowns, Tulane boasts two more SEC trophies than half of the SEC combined.

Vanderbilt, Arkansas, South Carolina, Missouri, Texas A&M, Texas and Oklahoma have zero SEC football titles. Mississippi State has a single championship from 1941 for a total of one from eight members of the 16-team conference.

Perhaps the time is right for Tulane to return to the conference it left in 1966.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

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This fall, Tiger Stadium begins its 103rd season.

The pages you've just read explain why this program changed, how this roster was built and why expectations have rarely been higher. But magazines don't win football games. People do.

Now the conversations end. Preparation gives way to performance. Hope gives way to proof.

This fall, perhaps the most important chapter in modern LSU football begins—not because of one coach or one roster, but because the sport itself has changed, and LSU has chosen to change with it.

The story isn't finished.

It's just beginning.

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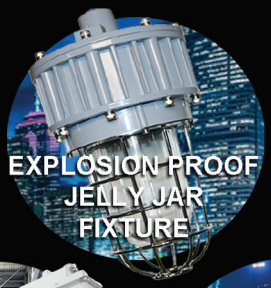

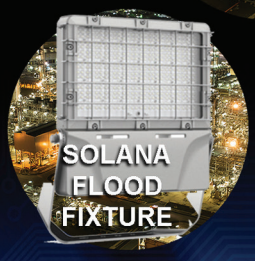

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